

NZ

Est. 2007 | JUNE / JULY 2024 | ISSUE 101

HUNTER



BATTLE OF THE BROADHEADS

Tackling a seriously hot topic

THE NEW 7MM PRC

The testing continues

WESTLAND IN THE WINTER

Reuben braves the cold

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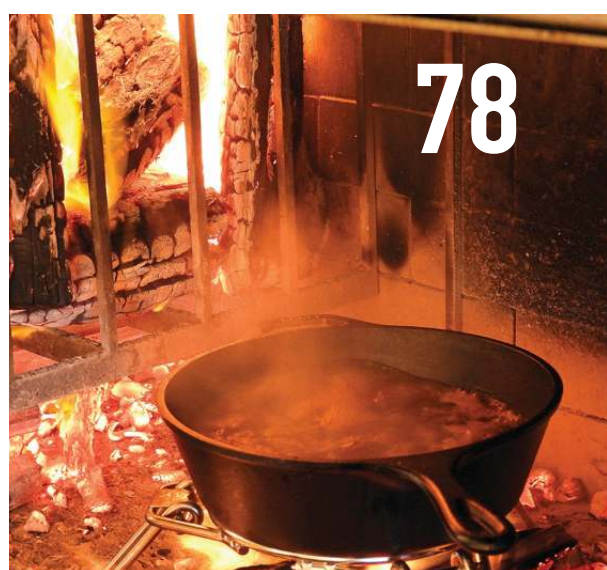
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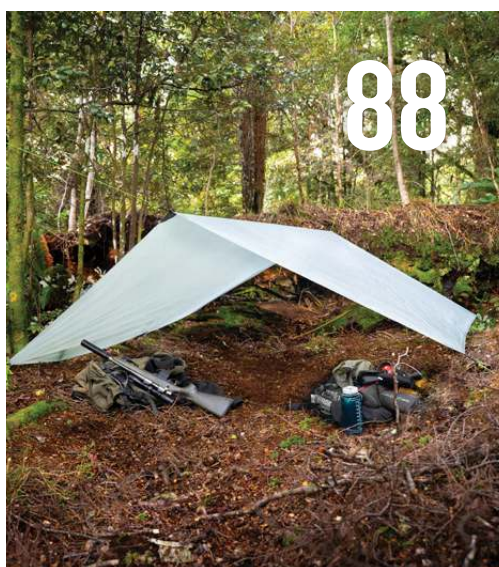
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COVER DESIGN: Intrigue Limited
www.intrigue.co.nz

PAGE DESIGN: Luke Care

PRINTER: Inkwise
www.inkwise.co.nz | ph 03 307 7930

DISTRIBUTION: Are Direct
www.aredirect.co.nz | ph 09 940 4921

DISCLAIMER: NZ Hunter is not responsible for mishaps of any kind which may occur from use of published loading data or from recommendations by staff writers. Further, neither the publishers nor the editors accept responsibility for the accuracy of statements or opinions expressed by freelance writers.

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POSTAL ADDRESS:

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NZ HUNTER WELCOMES ARTICLES:

Submitted via a file transfer service (eg dropbox) or emailed as a word document and include photographs. Contributors will be paid in the month following publication.

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ISSN 1178 – 007X

COVER PHOTO: A Point South Tipi tent in the cold Godley Valley

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



are incorrect. Forest & Bird initiated the legal action to clarify the legality of the wapiti management agreement."

Winter feels like it's here now, with quite a few snow dumps occurring in May. The roar timing was interesting, generally late in most places with the Sika roar especially seeming more spasmodic with quite a bit of activity well on into May.

This was as a result of the variable weather patterns and less daylight hours in a lot of places over summer. We can expect some late fawns on the ground next spring and summer.

No doubt you've all heard Forest and Bird have put their judicial review of DOC and the community agreement between the Department and the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation on hold for 6 months. This is straight from their press release:

"Forest & Bird welcomes the opportunity to work with the Wapiti Foundation and DOC on this critical issue," Forest & Bird Chief Executive Nicola Toki said.

"There have been inaccurate suggestions that Forest & Bird's legal action is aimed at exterminating wapiti, with some speculation the judicial review could even mean the end for all game animals," Ms Toki said.

"I want to be clear that these suggestions

Hmmm, Forest and Bird's lodging of the judicial review in the first place has already cost conservation hugely. The Department has spent a lot of time and money on this issue, as has the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation. This is all money that could have been spent on conservation, especially when the Department has so little money left in its biodiversity budget. **The only people who get rich out of judicial reviews are lawyers. What is Forest and Birds end game here, I have to wonder?** They say they are not trying to stop the FWF's deer management and conservation programs – then why on earth did they announce the judicial review in the first place, which threatened to do exactly that? The Department and the FWF would have happily sat down and worked through their concerns if they are only trying to clarify the "legality of the agreement"? There is a very very fishy smell around this. I hope they prove me wrong and they do enter into collaborative discussions with DOC and the FWF, with the end result being they support the setting up of the first "Herd of Special Interest" for Wapiti, with all the win win conservation outcomes that will have for a place of Aotearoa New Zealand very dear to my heart.

If you were one of the awesome people who donated to help the FWF fight this judicial review, depending on the

outcome of this collaboration, your funding may well still be needed!

Going forward there has to be a better way to get good collaborative outcomes for both conservation and recreation in New Zealand – and locking it up and throwing away the key will not work! Removing the very species that so many New Zealanders highly regard, that then means they will no longer visit and value these areas and put their hard earned money into their associated conservation programs, is plain stupid. With so many other things for the Government to spend its money on, economic reality is that conservation is going to come further down the list of priorities. User pays community initiatives like the FWF's are very much going to be the way of the future in a lot of areas, and we should be empowering them - not putting them in limbo wasting theirs and the Department's time and money with pointless judicial reviews! We do not want the future of these essential conservation initiatives and the recreations we are so passionate about to be at the whim of Forest and Bird's hierarchy and other ecological ideologists. The winds of change are in the air, so let's unite to make sure the changes are the right ones! Watch this space...

The tahr rut is upon us, so let's hope we get some settled weather so that the extremely capable and ever patient James Scott can get the ballot block guys in to enjoy that wonderful opportunity. And for those of us without blocks who are beating the feet to get into some remote tahr country - we need the good weather too! And don't forget to shoot a few nannies while you are there!

Greg

SPOT THE LOGO

The winners for last issue are **Ian Burton** and **Bryan Vickery**. Logos appeared on page 63, the Swazi advert, and page 105 the Beretta advert

Visit www.nzhunter.co.nz for this issue's "Spot the Logo" Competition

Two prizes of \$100 H&F vouchers to be won www.nzhunter.co.nz/spot-the-logo-competition

You are looking for



CHRONOGRAPH/LABRADAR CLARIFICATION

In the Garmin X1 Zero test a couple of issues ago we reported tests between the Garmin, LabRadar and the Oehler 43. To be able to test against the Oehler 43, it meant placing the Doppler units at the down range end of the lightbox set up I use with the Oehler, so they could get a clear, unimpeded view of the bullets path for the Doppler radar to sense it correctly. This meant the Oehler was reading its velocity closer to the muzzle

than the Dopplers, and hence would record a higher velocity. Using Applied ballistics you can calculate the Doppler units' velocities back to the same place as the Oehler 43 to get some sort of comparison.

Fraser Cann the NZ LabRadar distributor has pointed out testing this way was not fair on the LabRadar, and on reflection he is correct. It has a different triggering system to the Garmin, and therefore it was not an apples with apples comparison, and also I was testing the latest model Garmin with the earliest model Lab Radar. I did some

further testing with the LabRadar against the Garmin X1 at the muzzle and the results were within a few fps of each other with rifles from a 223 on upwards, and both matched very closely (within 5fps) the average of a string of shots with the same ammo across the Oehler. **The LabRadar had been my go-to chronograph unit away from my home range since it first came out, and has always been a very reliable unit once I added the accessory microphone - even with suppressors and not ideal unit placement.**



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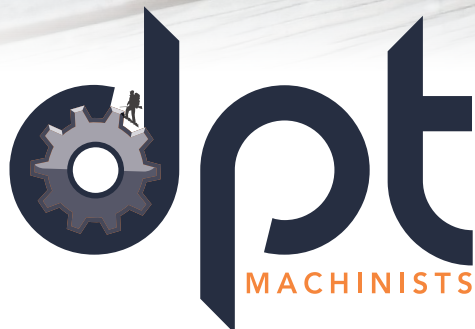
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INTRIGUE 02432 - 03/24

'T WAS THE WEEK BEFORE EXAMS

WRITTEN BY ~ REUBEN JONES AND CHARLIE FLOYD

**"'T WAS THE WEEK BEFORE EXAMS,
WHEN STUDENTS SHOULD STUDY.**

**THE FORECAST WAS CLEAR, SO
INSTEAD I RANG MY BUDDY.**

**THE SATELLITE IMAGES SHOWED A
GOOD DUMP OF SNOW,**

**WITH A BIG MISSION PLANNED WHO
KNEW HOW FAR WE'D GO.**

**WE LOADED THE POOR CAMRY WITH
OUR CRAMPONS AND AXE,**

**HOPING TO STOP A GNARLY
MOUNTAIN MONSTER IN HIS TRACKS."**

**Charlie and I were determined
to reach the wilderness areas
within Westland Tai Poutini
National Park**

A challenging enough trip mid-summer, we knew our equipment and bodies would be tested. After a good look at the avalanche forecast, we figured that the snow pack would settle over the coming days allowing us to drop off the more dangerous southern face of the range into remote country.

Anyone who has hunted with Charlie Floyd will know that keeping up with the whippet is the biggest challenge. I managed to hold on

until we broke the scrubline when I could finally use the hunter's excuse for a breather – glassing. The light was already fading on a stunning West Coast evening, so there was no time to waste. We threw the tent up and climbed to a vantage point to pick up a handful of chamois bucks strutting the ridgelines before darkness engulfed everything. It was a very promising start.

We were expecting a front to come through on the second day so waking to rain and snow on the tent was no surprise. I'd brought a fly as a backup for the trusty Olympus and we used it to store our gear, leaving the vestibule for cooking and melting snow. It was pitched only a



short distance from the tent with our walking poles and it soon became clear that the resident kea quite fancied it as his shelter from the storm. Anyone who has spent time camping with kea knows the potential risk to gear, and this fella quickly got the name "sabotage". It was a fitting name as the fly and tent gained a few handy ventilation holes overnight.

When we crawled out of the igloo that evening 15 centimetres of fresh snow had fallen. This would make the next phase of the mission a lot more difficult. The night was bitterly cold so we planned to get up and go at the crack of dawn the next day. Hopefully the snow would freeze hard enough to walk on and make climbing a breeze.

It was not to be, and it took a long time and a lot of gas to defrost the boots enough to get them on. The tent was frozen solid, making packing it up a bit of a joke. It was either dare to take the gloves off and use our hands to defrost the joins in the tent poles, or put them in your mouth long enough to pull them apart. Even rolling up the fly was a circus act and I'd say the packed volume would have doubled. By the time we were mobile, the sun was up, and the snow was getting soft.

A few nannies and young bulls whistling away on the ridge in front of us provided some mid-morning entertainment. They must have been enjoying the sun because they let us plod away to within 100 yards before disappearing into the vertical rock faces they call home. The near-constant drone of helicopters detracted from the serenity, but for tourism operators that would have been grounded the previous day, the good weather would mean a good payday. Of slight concern was the number of choppers, not just doing their glacier landing and scenic loops, but doing AATH (aerially-assisted trophy hunting). I suppose any opportunity to make a dollar is a good one.

The ridge had a solid metre of snow with deep wind drifts, cornices and bluffs at every turn. We had to be on the ball. Neither of us had done any formal in-person avalanche training and I was relying on the avalanche advisory and modules I had completed online to keep us safe. We post-holed our way along before one final push to a summit. Post-holing is a term for travelling through snow with a thin, hard crust - just hard enough to support your weight as you lift yourself up, only to give way at the last minute. Combine it with a thousand vertical metres of climbing and you are in for a long day.

Before the clag rolled in we had a quick glimpse at the ridge Charlie had used to previously drop down off the range. Nothing but snow as far as the eye could see came as a bit of a shock, and we knew we would want to give it another day before attempting the steep face, waiting for the risk of storm slab avalanches to subside. Setting about boot-packing a spot for the tent, we knew we were in for a cold one. The tent was still frozen in my pack. I really wished I had some crocs as my boots, encased in ice, were far from easy to get on and off. At around 4pm the tahr started to appear again. Splitting up from Charlie to glass more country, I was without a spotter and had to use the camera



The igloo



Packing up this morning was a bit of a joke, everything was frozen



Before the clag rolled in we had a quick glimpse at the ridge Charlie had used to previously drop down off the range



A bull looking magnificent in his winter coat



A middle-aged bull was hot on the heels of a nanny. He wasn't at all concerned about me



to evaluate animals. The batteries were kept under my armpit and still drained in minutes in the cold.

Disappearing into a layer of sea fog, the sight of the sun setting from a snow-capped West Coast ridge cannot be beat. The myriad shades of orange and purple off the clouds and off the snow make for a beautiful end to the day. Within seconds of the sun disappearing, however, the cold creeps in. It becomes a race to scurry back into the frozen tent, into the frozen sleeping bag with frozen hair and frozen feet to warm a frozen gas canister just enough to melt the frozen snow.

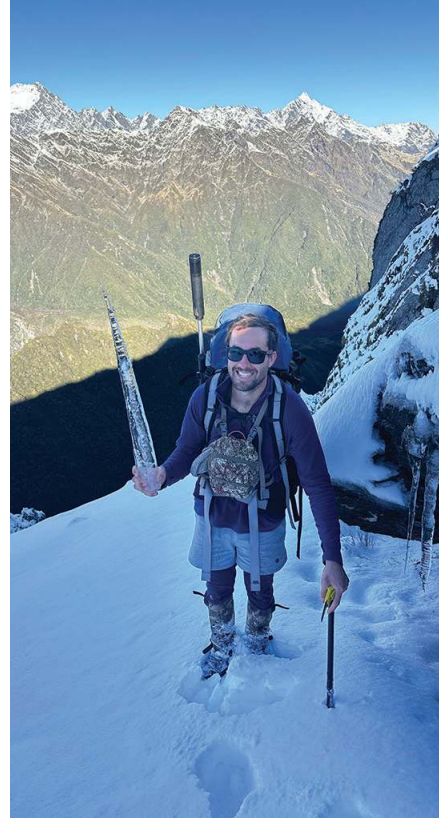
Thankfully, the sun came up again, and we took the opportunity for one last glass from the ridgeline.

Just as I was looking for a spot to go to the loo, a nanny popped up, and I slowly reached for the camera, praying the batteries were holding charge. A middle-aged bull was hot on her heels. He wasn't at all concerned about me, as I perched on the ridge with the toilet paper already on the pick of the ice axe some 15 yards away. He was fired up, curling his lip to test if the nannies were on heat and puffing his beautiful golden mane. We were after a head skin for a bull Charlie had taken from the same country in summer but still wanted to harvest a bull ten years or older, so this fine specimen was left.

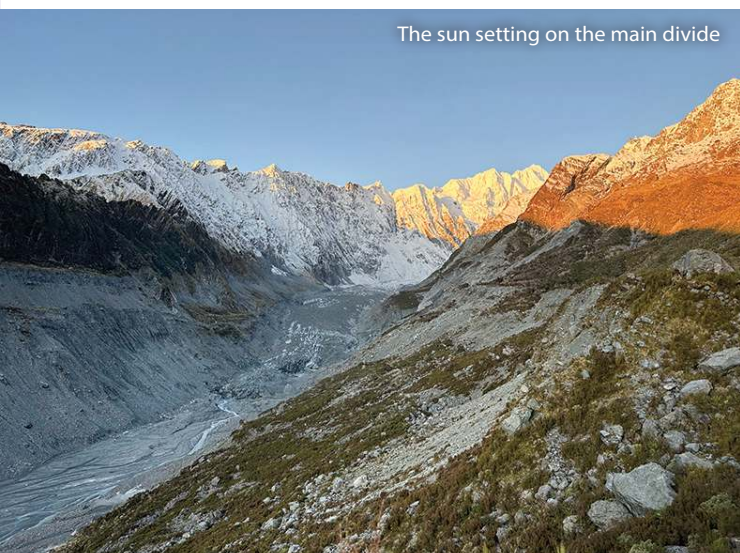
The next morning, after repeating the frozen tent pack-up rigmarole, we made our way down into the frozen world.

As we prepared to begin the steep descent the all-too-familiar hum of a Hughes 500 helicopter working the faces got louder and louder.

Suddenly the machine appeared below us, and we couldn't believe it. He had landed right where we wanted to camp. We watched through the binos as the guide and shooter got out. We were waiting for them to set up for a shot, but they just stood around glassing. The bulls we had been watching had quickly hidden in the scrub, and after minutes and minutes of the camo-clad guests walking around on the flat, they glassed us idiots perched up on the frozen ridge. The guy who spotted us didn't just walk to the chopper, he ran to grab his companions before the helicopter roared to life and gunned it out of the valley. I can understand the appeal of hunting from a helicopter, but it was a kick in the guts having them land in a wilderness area right where we wanted to be.



The sun setting on the main divide



The terminus of a West Coast glacier



Unsurprisingly, the tahr didn't fancy being zapped by a Yank from a chopper and did a good job hiding. It wasn't until last light that a bull that really sparked our interest appeared on a slip. We couldn't age him properly but, we knew from his body that he was mature. By the time we had reached that conclusion he was gone again. That's the nature of West Coast scrub hunting.

We made our way down out of the valley the next day and across a big boulder field. As we broke from the scrub a very appetising moraine wall appeared. **We knew there were animals everywhere around us; it was just a case of finding them on the scrub edge.** Charlie froze and pointed out some chamois - a doe, kid and buck - that had popped up to see who their visitors were less than

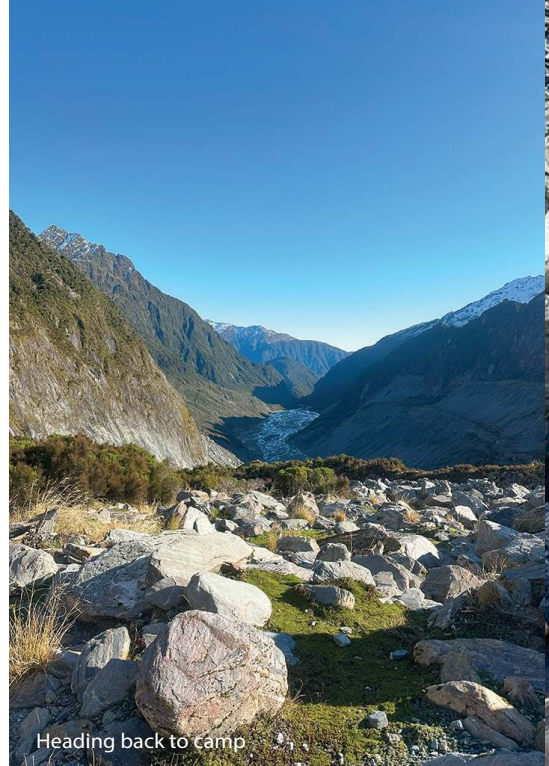
a hundred yards away. This is a typical sight when the chamois are rutting, and the buck was not small. 10" is the magic number and Charlie wasn't convinced it was there. I told him I thought it was, so he told me to shoot it. So I did.

When we made our way to his final resting place it quickly became clear that it was a little bigger than Charlie had thought at 10 ¼ on the short horn. I immediately felt a sense of guilt that I shouldn't have been the one pulling the trigger. Charlie was doing a good job of showing his stoke but I was very conflicted. The thing I had been looking for, for many years, was finally in front of me. But, I hadn't spotted it.

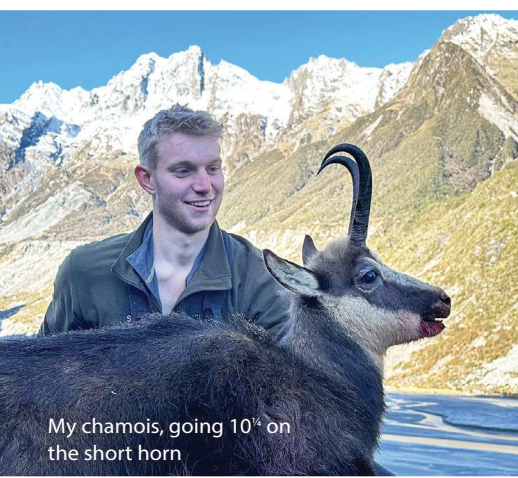
This animal was plagued with some form of facial eczema. The skin was very flaky with hair falling off the face in large clumps, and the cape was

ruined. **Despite the skin issues, the dark gamey meat of a rutting buck was not going to go to waste.** We harvested what we needed and crossed over into the sun at the base of the moraine wall to cook up a great stew.

This has become quite the routine. It involves first boiling 500ml of water in a Jetboil. Pour in a packet of minted and salted peas and leave to rehydrate, while swapping to a pan on the burner and frying the thinly sliced steak. **Once seared, add a sachet of gravy mix and some dried onion, along with just enough water to make a thick gravy.** Add the peas to the gravy and do another 500ml in the Jetboil. Add instant kumara mash (if you've been lucky enough to track some down) and stir till firm. Half the mash can be scooped into the pan and then half the stew back into the Jetboil, meaning no



Heading back to camp



My chamois, going 10* on the short horn

extra dishes and a hearty hill meal.

I packed a strange item up the hill the next day. A snaplock bag with pens, past exam papers, tutorials and my summary notes for my maths papers. Splitting off from Charlie, I perched up at my desk on a large rock in the sun watching nannies and young bulls in the scrub while learning about Laplace Transforms. My Jetboil had a spot on the desk and, in true student fashion, I had some Mi Goreng noodles to keep me going. Despite the frequent rockfall providing a reminder I was sitting on the edge of a massive glacier, I made good progress and had enough time to go for an

evening stooge in the upper limits of the scrub.

The tahr were certainly in residence. A good bull, estimated to be around 13" but only 4 or 5 years old, appeared on last light right after I had decided it was too dark to use the camera. **At least they were here, just hunkered up hiding from the death machines in the sky.**

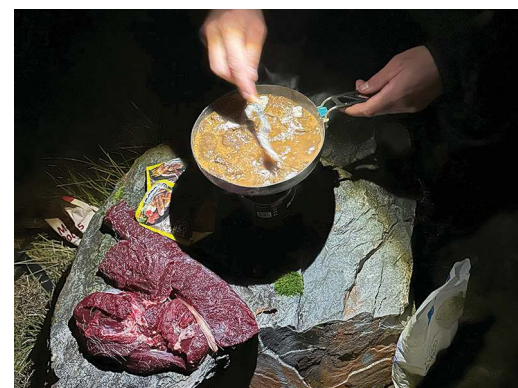
When I got back to the tent I could tell there was something Charlie was dying to show me. Not another 15" bull like I was expecting but this time it was my sleeping bag. I had laid it on a warm rock to dry out in the afternoon sun, and as it had got dark, it had frozen as stiff as a board. We were left with no choice but to find some dead scrub and coax a fire to life. I am not sure what I would have done if we hadn't been able to defrost the bag. The comforting smell of smoke in that bag is a permanent reminder of the importance of a sleeping bag to survive in the winter alpine environment.

I hunted up-valley with Charlie and we spotted another buck moving away from us on the scrubby moraine wall. Trying to assess a moving animal

through a scope is nearly impossible and I got a look that made me think he was big. Charlie, again the spotter, was on the fence but I eagerly encouraged him to shoot it. There was no shortage of chamois bucks and he put it down. The animal was a fine specimen, 9 5/8ths long. Charlie didn't seem that happy with himself, and I blamed myself for pressuring him to take the shot. I was still feeling bad about robbing him of the 10 earlier in the trip. This buck also had the same skin condition and his head skin would not be suitable for a shoulder mount. The steaks, however, were in great condition. We would eat well again, as the meat from my buck had frozen solid and was proving difficult to cut.

After celebratory pancakes in the pan the next morning, we were set to retrace our steps partway out. The big bull we dreamed of hadn't materialised on this trip. We had spent the previous evening watching a perfect bench above the moraine wall to no avail, until at last light, I had spied a tall dracophyllum bush shaking around. I had the crosshairs trained on the next clearing and, sure enough, the bull

The stew that has become a favourite of ours

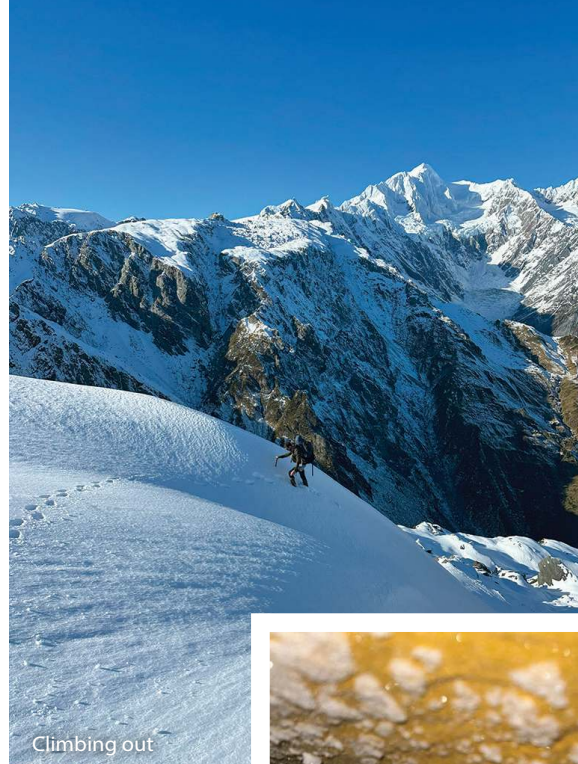




Prepping for my exams in a Westland National Park



Both our bucks pride of place on our last morning



Climbing out



Heavy ice inside the tent

walked out. Another seven or eight-year-old animal, so we left him to feed and dropped back to the valley floor.

Two days later, we were back in Fox, having a burger at the pub. The journey out had been less taxing with footsteps from our descent making the climb back up much easier. We had taken a

shortcut home and had fleeting glimpses of a big chamois buck down low in the bush. Too slow and too cold to prepare the rifle, he had got away. It is entertaining to think we had gone all that way in search of something right in front of us, but it was about so much more than the animals. We had been

on a true adventure at a time of year when most hunters fancy a heli drop-off and canvas tent with a fireplace.

With some fine trophies in tow, it would take a couple of weeks of exams to forget the suffering and be keener than ever to do it all again.



Black Diamond

Photo Credit: Dave Greig @wilderness_lens

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WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

NOTHING WRONG WITH A RAIN DAY





Aptly named, The Godley Valley in the high hinterland of South Canterbury is breath-taking in both it's scenery and it's bone-chilling winter cold

This would be my third visit, but I was a little wary of the 4wding in to the valley owing to severe flooding in early 2023 making the route quite challenging. There had been a few vehicles sacrificed to the river gods before our trip.

It was a bit of risk going solo but the Hilux was up to the task, and we had organised a rescue party if we got stuck (though I'd have to be seriously stuck before I let Joseph Peter pull me out...).

Myself, Samantha, my brother Jake and his girlfriend Shayla played it nice

and safe on our way in. Some simple safety steps like recording the route on the GPS so we could backtrack easily, getting out of the vehicle to check all of the soft spots and crossings, and judicious applications of speed and power (both aspects somewhat lacking in the ol' Hilux) had us at our planned campsite in about three hours. With

a poor forecast in the offing we set up an elaborate camp in a sheltered corner. The Points South Tipi Tent was tucked behind a rocky headland and surrounded by tall matagouri – just the place to comfortably weather an alpine storm.

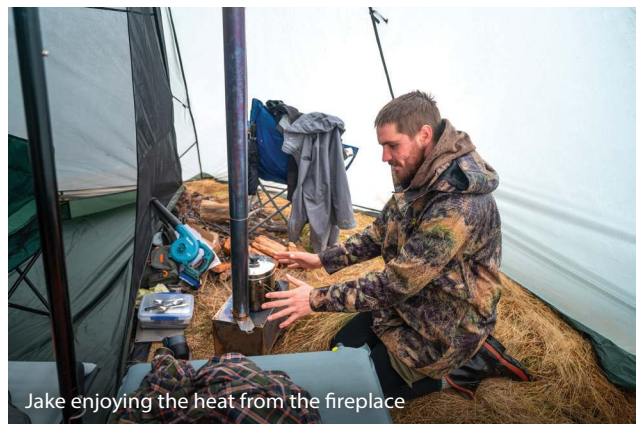
True to the forecast it was pretty wild overnight then eased to steady precipitation, alternating between rain and snow. We settled in with a roaring fire going and plenty of hot drinks and snacks, there's nothing wrong with a rain day every now and then. Not great hunting, but a very nice way to spend my last birthday south of 30. Relaxing in a hot tent with a good book and good company I greatly enjoyed myself. Often if I'm stressed out this is what I picture, being in a hut somewhere with the fire going and rain pouring down - except it was in a tent with snow pouring down, at least we had a fire and a steady supply of dry blue gum I'd brought along.

The long nights are an attraction to winter hunting for me. I'm not one of those people who naps during the day well, and if I've got 16 hours between a morning hunt and an evening hunt I feel the need to pack





The advent of hot tents has been made winter hunting a much more pleasant pastime



Jake enjoying the heat from the fireplace



Samantha and Shayla checking out some young bulls down low



There's room for four people to comfortably stretch out, dry gear, cook food - what's not to love!



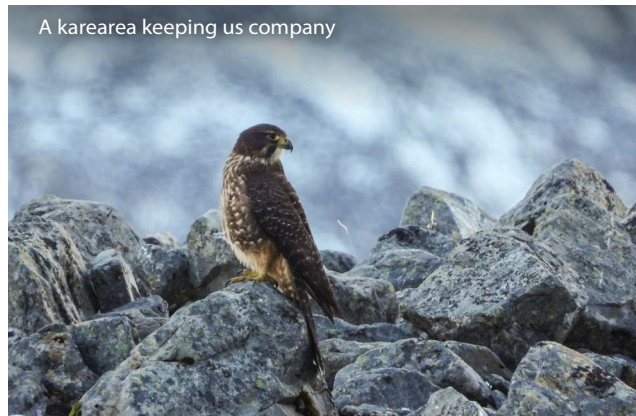
A pretty good bull left on the hill - presumably from culling



A fairly typical five year old herd bull

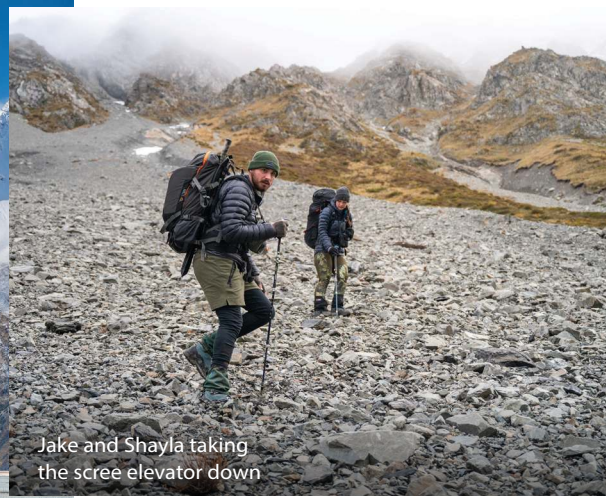


A karearea keeping us company





A day of sunshine and the valley was transformed!



Jake and Shayla taking the scree elevator down

day it wasn't long before we bailed out, spying a good one on dark near the mouth of the side stream but we ran out of light to get a good look.

The next morning was all about targeting that bigger bull. There was a beautiful dusting of light snow all around, and we were up there nice and early, spending a while waiting for light. **As soon as we could see him, he could see us, and he was a very cagey bull - he definitely knew what humans were.** A marked difference to the oblivious younger bulls the day before.

As we crept closer I could make out six age rings clearly through the spotter, maybe seven, so he could have been eight years old with the age ring tucked in to the hair at the base but it just wasn't clear enough to be worth the risk. He was an even more tempting bull than the day before, a sore test of our ethics as I had three tahr novices with me - all looking a little keen!

We left him rolling snowballs down the dark side of the mountain as he pestered a nanny and carried on up the face, finding another bull way up in the ice that was too far out of reach for our equipment. **For the afternoon we explored up the main valley, moving out in to riverbed to glass the main faces without much luck.**

I find rutting tahr tend to prefer side streams as opposed to the main faces. Maybe from pressure of hunters travelling the main valley? I doubt it's because of weather, they seem to laugh at days well in the negatives. Often standing exposed on ridges in glacial winds, our winters must be puny compared to the bone-deep cold of a Nepalese mountain season. Once we were back to camp I went over the photos of the first bull and



The better bull on the cold side of the valley

up and move and make the most of the day! With the long winter nights you've got plenty of time to sit around a hot meal, a brew or a mulled wine, chew the fat with your mates and read a book. All things I greatly enjoy!

Day three was our first look at bull tahr. The culling inside the National Park boundary was apparent, particularly on the numbers of mature bulls. Unfortunately we found the remains of one cracking middle-aged bull down low, he was a bit smelly to take with us though.

We climbed high on two potential bulls, but weren't quite confident in

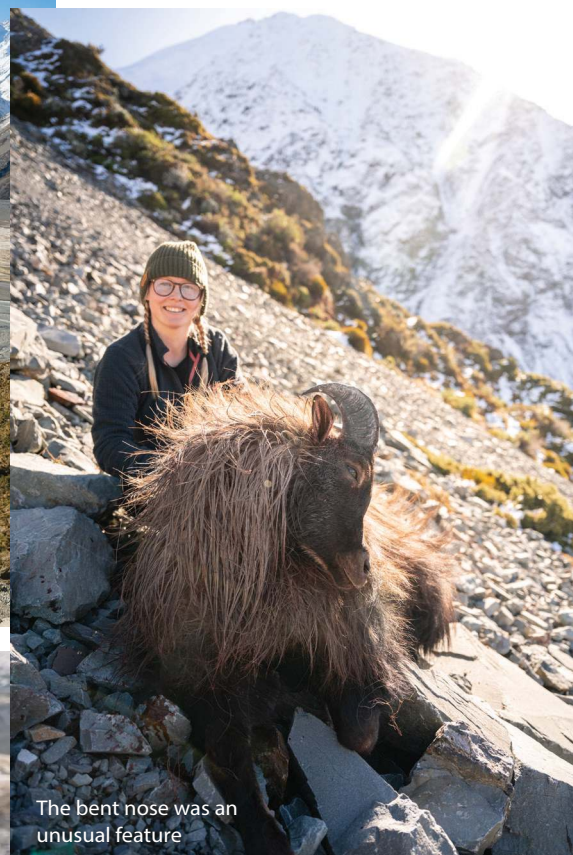
the age indicators. One was a young bull with great length, then another bull emerged to investigate the same nanny. He looked to have a few age rings stacked around the bases but I wasn't confident enough that they weren't just horn texture as it's mane looked quite immature. My eager companions made sure I was absolutely certain before they agreed to turn around and lose all of the elevation we'd climbed to check the bulls out, the scree slope made for any easier trip down though.

The day yielded more bulls on the opposite side of the valley, but all were young. With so few hours in a winter



Sam with the ancient nanny living on the flats

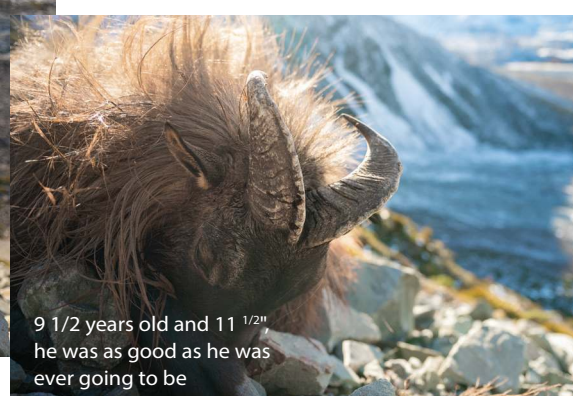




The bent nose was an unusual feature



Sam very chuffed with her first bull tahr



9 1/2 years old and 11 1/2" he was as good as he was ever going to be

was happy with our decision, he wasn't old enough.

The next day called for yet another early start, and we used the truck to gain a few kilometres before daylight. Not long after we left the truck I spotted a four-legged something on the flats in the pre-dawn darkness.

I pulled the rifle up and established it was an ancient old nanny. It would've been a great first for any of the crew but she was extremely wary, as befitted such a matriarch, so I quickly put her down with the little 6.5 Grendel we'd been carrying for nanny control.

As it turned out she truly was ancient, 16 years old with heavy cataracts. She must have moved to the flats to avoid the bulls pestering her. The amazing thing was she had a healthy kid still hanging around – they're one hell of a hardy animal to still be breeding at that age in that environment!

After some quick butchery we rounded the corner to a new, shallower side valley with high hopes of a more

mature bull.

As we settled down to glass we noted a couple of small, scattered nanny groups and with them some bulls. **Nothing really piqued my interest until a much more mature animal stepped out at the top of a large shingle fan.** He was a good 500m off the valley floor but here was a bull that finally showed horns with the shape indicating age. The tips come down far enough to make them look like a tighter arc, not like handlebars back off the skull. It was a tricky call though, as despite his horn, heavier shoulders and his cape (an unreliable indicator at the best of times) he didn't appear particularly large compared to the juveniles and nannies with him.

Either way, he warranted a closer look, so while Jake and Shayla stayed down to guide us in, Sam and I raced upstream to get around the thermal that would have been rushing up the hill and then climbed on to a ridge. I had a better look at 500 yards and was confident of his age. We slithered

a bit further forward to 470 and got the Tikka set up. It was a tricky angle for Sam, a very steep uphill shot. She was as composed as ever and pulled off a great shot, dropping the bull on the spot. He rolled a pleasing amount down the hill, but fortunately not great big cartwheels that would have me worrying for his horns.

We radioed Jake and Shayla to join in the celebrations, then carefully stepped our way across the scree. As we neared the bull I lifted its head and could clearly see the age on his horns. I turned to congratulate Sam and the motion tipped the bull from his precarious perch and he rolled another 200 yards down the hill ... earning me some glares from Sam – she wanted the photos to show the altitude we were chasing tahr around in!

We made careful progress down to the bull, again, and got it set up a little more securely this time. He was a perfect 9 1/2 year old bull, just the sort of mature trophy Sam had

been looking for it. Unfortunately the melting snow he had rolled through made the glorious mane look a little bedraggled. **Interestingly he had what looked like a broken nose, perhaps the reason for his smaller size.** I've since discovered that the nose is a rare, presumably genetic, anomaly - similar to the campylognathie bent nose affliction in deer, most commonly seen in Sika in New Zealand.

After a few photos we removed the head and rolled it down the hill properly, getting it right to the base of the scree this time for a better working platform. Jake came up and joined me as we weighed up our options – cape or skin? Ultimately Jake wanted the skin so we set about taking that off for Animal Skin Tanning Services in Invercargill, handily we were heading to the FWF Winter Wapiti Weekend as soon as we got out and could drop it off!

The sun worked its way down below the horizon while we sliced and tugged the heavy leather, dropping the temperature about 10 degrees in as many seconds and slowly freezing the skin as we toiled.

We stashed the head, skin and meat while we explored further up the valley,



A team photo at the end of a successful trip!

but the numbers dropped sharply the further we ventured into the National Park. **Looping back to the gear we enjoyed the beautiful twilight of the upper**

Godley Valley in the middle of winter before plodding along the flats under headlamps.

We finished up with yet more celebrations in the luxury of our



I was pleased with the performance of the Hilux, the Ironman modifications had made it super capable

hot tent that night – Sam's first bull tahr! Putting the feather in a cap of a surprisingly restorative sub-zero foray into arguably the most stark winter wastes we have in New Zealand.



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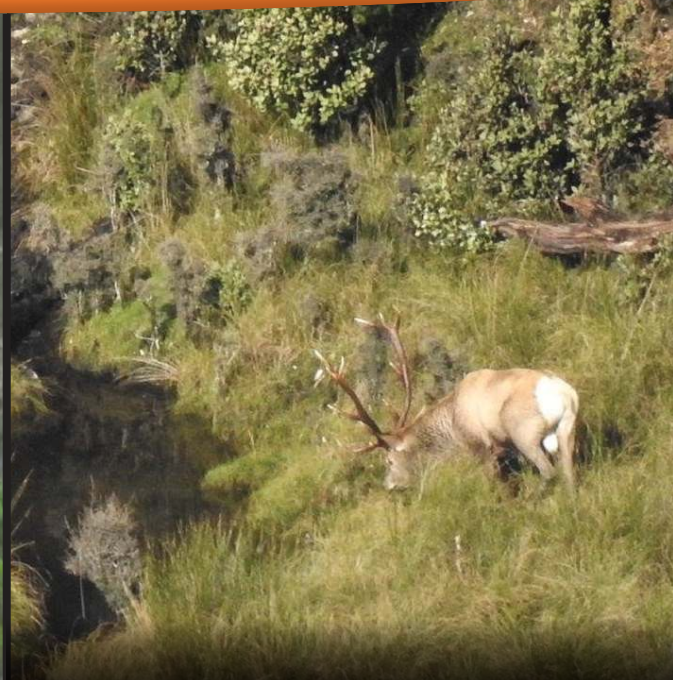


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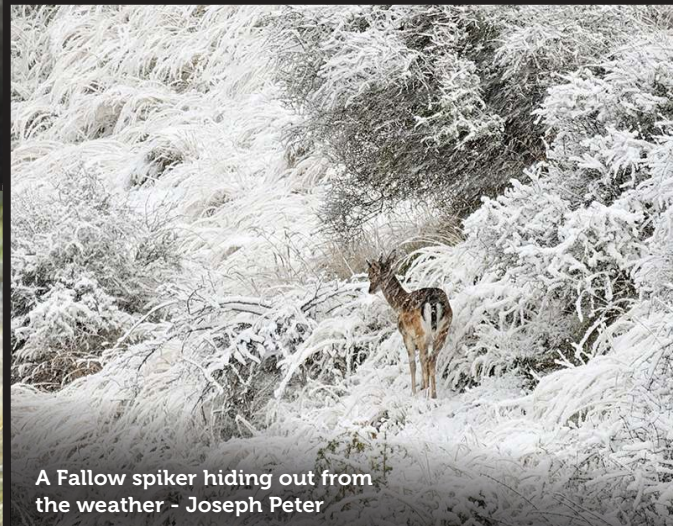


WINNER

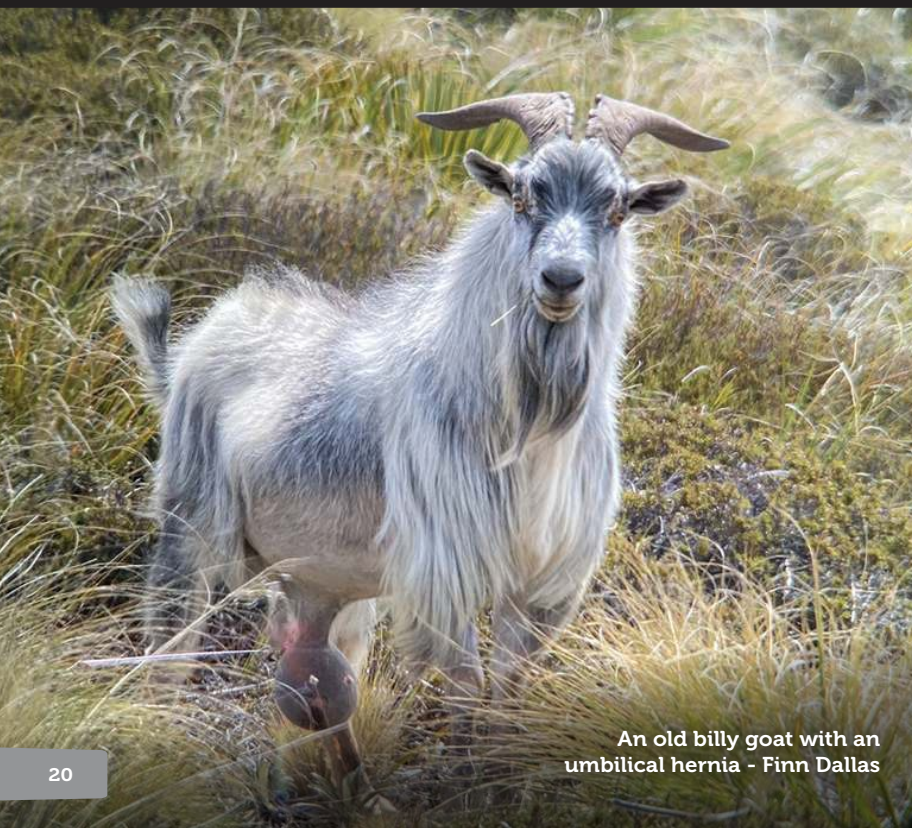
A Wapiti bull that we thought looked too young but had great potential so we ditched the rifle and snuck into about 120 yards with the camera - Lewis Jackson



A Wapiti bull Kieran Anderson spotted in Fiordland



A Fallow spiker hiding out from the weather - Joseph Peter



An old billy goat with an umbilical hernia - Finn Dallas



The suppressor is so quiet I can sneak in close! Taken with the iphone at three metres - Callum Wood



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COLD PARADISE

WRITTEN BY ~ ADAM ROSS



Winter is an interesting time for hunting. Long nights, short days, snow, ice and all the rest, can make things a little bit unpleasant

Unpleasant is, of course, manageable with the right gear and a week's acclimation after West Coast tahr ballots. With many hunters at home, or running thermals over crop paddocks, the high country can be largely empty and provide a last opportunity to secure a trophy set of antlers.

This excursion involved five days in July. The forecast was perfect, and the snow level remained unseasonably high for that time of year. Our leave balances were running dangerously low after some great roar and rut trips from the previous months, but with little convincing, Dad, Troy, and I found ourselves with packs on, heading into familiar country.

After the usual grind in, we spent the first few days up high, based out of the relative luxury of a hut. We saw good numbers of deer and chamois

on the faces that weren't frozen solid, but nothing of the calibre we were after. We did, however, see our first Judas tahr.

The nanny had managed to pick a boyfriend obviously keen on her unusual necklace. We lamented that life must not be very enjoyable for that poor old girl, albeit an important sacrifice for wildlife management. Prospects for the roughly 12" bull she was with probably weren't great either.

We kept hunting in the upper reaches of the valley and saw a handful of

deer happily living in snow, as well as some fresh stoat tracks, which was simultaneously impressive and distressing. On the morning of day three we opted to head back down the valley to more typical winter country. **The lower valley was a broken mix of clearings, beech and scrub, all north-facing and looking like a relative paradise.**

We planned to climb up onto a ridge which overlooked the head of a large side creek. Almost ready to fill up with water and start heading up hill, we spotted a small family mob of deer moving across a slip, well within range. Not one to pass up a handy freezer filler and always keen to do my bit for herd management, I knocked over a yearling hind. We hung the legs near the river knowing that they would be frozen by the time we came back past, with no chance of the meat spoiling.

After a solid grind, we found a campsite on the bushline and split up for the evening. Dad and I went to hunt over some kākūka faces below camp, and Troy

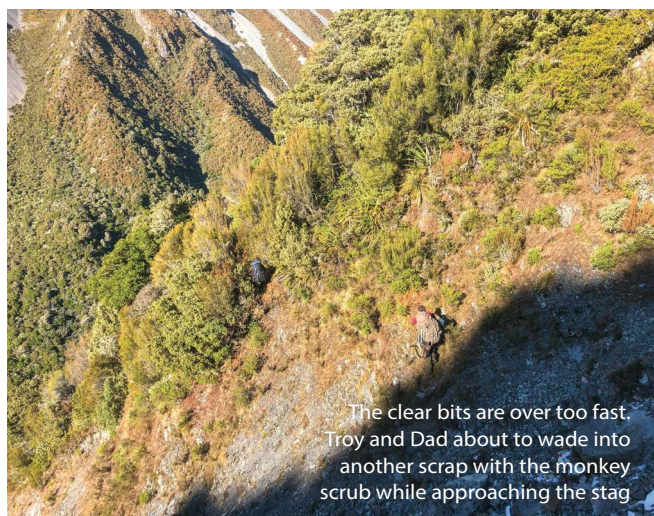
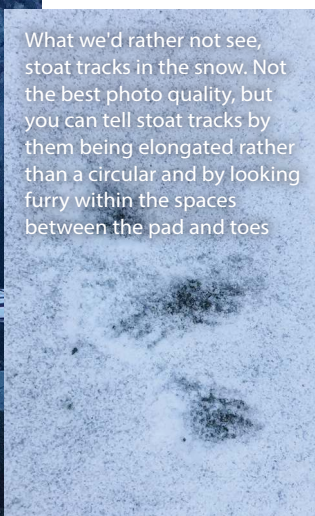


4:30pm sunsets - a stark feature of wintertime hunting



Deer tracks in up in the cold stuff

What we'd rather not see, stoat tracks in the snow. Not the best photo quality, but you can tell stoat tracks by them being elongated rather than a circular and by looking furry within the spaces between the pad and toes

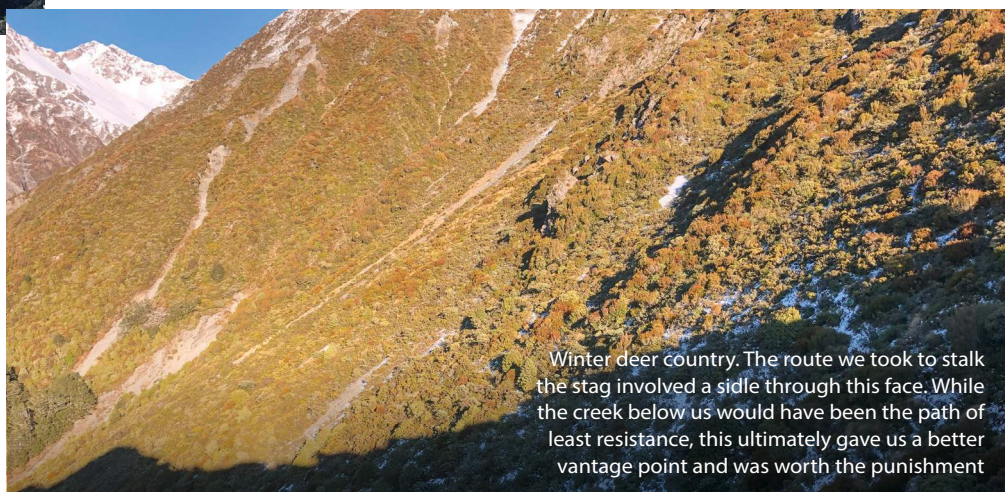


The clear bits are over too fast. Troy and Dad about to wade into another scrap with the monkey scrub while approaching the stag

aimed for a lookout point into the head of the side creek. Dad and I had a relatively uneventful evening. Just before dark, I called Troy on the radio, who said he had seen a reasonable 10-pointer off in the distance but didn't really give anything away.

Troy didn't arrive back at camp until well after dark. Under the glare of his headlight, I could see a grin from ear to ear. **When he pulled out his Phoneskope footage I found out why. Troy had seen four stags on a face up the valley and one was a special deer.** Obviously mature, with good weight and length right out to his tops, and a beautiful round shape. Missing beys and with four on one top made him a very tidy 11-pointer and definitely a shooter. We went to sleep full of anticipation for what was to come the next day.

As the sun crested over the ridge, providing little in the way of warmth, three hunters resembling Michelin men were perched on a ridge, glassing the



Winter deer country. The route we took to stalk the stag involved a sidle through this face. While the creek below us would have been the path of least resistance, this ultimately gave us a better vantage point and was worth the punishment

face where Troy had last seen the stag. We picked up the younger stags first, but it didn't take long until we had two spotters focused on the big 11 pointer. **At 1.5 kilometres away, the stag was not in any imminent danger.**

We had two options to close the gap; drop down into the creek and head straight for him, or sidle through a kilometre of monkey scrub to get on the opposite face. We went the latter. This is

almost always our default option where possible. **Despite the punishment we knew we were letting ourselves in for, we were less likely to get sprung by a stray thermal rising during the morning,** and it would ultimately put us in a better shooting position. Anyone who has pushed through a kilometre of monkey scrub with full packs knows how the next bit goes. Not technical, just a battle for every metre. Clear bits are



The struggle of getting everyone in on the iPhone self-timer, using a rock as a tripod



The stag as he lay. It was a huge relief to find him there after the searching



Dad and I with Troy's stag. An absolute privilege to take such a special animal in this environment



There something magical about the warmth of a fire at this time of year. Dad reminiscing on the day we had

over too fast, and the slow bits are energy-sapping and frustrating. Extra frustrating with a user-friendly riverbed 400 metres below us.

Just after lunchtime, we found ourselves perched on a small spur that offered some respite from the scrub. Conscious that we were close to being in range and doing our best to be inconspicuous, we began to plan for the next step. The stags had all camped up in the tall scrub and we hadn't seen them for a couple of hours. That changed quickly when we looked up to see a confused-looking 10-pointer staring in our direction. We all knew what was about to happen.

Troy quickly started kicking out a shooting position in the scrub, knowing that our cover was likely to get blown.

He barely got behind the rifle and the big stag stood up. I am not sure if he saw us, heard us, or if the 10-pointer barked, but either way, the stag was on his feet and alert at just over 450 metres. The stag was clearly spooked and started to walk away up the valley. Dad was on the binoculars, and I was frantically whispering ranges to Troy. He stopped broadside and Troy let one go. Nothing happened. The stag, showing no sign of being hit, jogged along and

stopped. I gave Troy another range at 510 metres, he adjusted his turret and let another shot go. Again, nothing happened and both Dad and I called a miss. This happened once more and again no sign of a hit. **Once the rangefinder read 580 metres, we decided to call it quits.**

The stag was still in view and, as far as we knew, the valley he was headed for was completely bluffed out. I remember watching him heading away and saying, "he's not out of our lives yet". He entered into a patch of tall dracophyllum and we waited for him to come out the other side. After ten minutes we wondered if he had camped up in there, the range combined with the suppressor having confused him.

A new plan was hatched: Dad and I would cross the valley, climb up the face and drop down onto where we had last seen him. Troy would stay on overwatch and walk us in with the radios. At this point, I was convinced of a miss. However, this is not like Troy, and I remember asking how the shot felt. He replied the rest wasn't the best, but the shots felt pretty good.

It took us the better part of an hour to drop down and circle around to end up above where we last saw the stag. **The radios proved invaluable to find landmarks which look so different once you are actually on the face.** Dad and I stayed 50 metres apart,

slowly peeking into small undulations in the topography as we approached the patch of dracophyllum. The Arms Code would call us 'being in a state of semi-readiness'. In truth, this was some of the most intense hunting I had ever had. At 30 metres from the patch of scrub, Dad stayed high while I cut down a scree to where the stag had gone in. I thought it was intense before, but cutting his tracks going into the scrub caused my heart rate to hit the redline. I crept on step by step waiting for the stag to flush. After 10 metres that felt like 100 metres, I saw the pearly white tops of antlers facing towards me. Well over the redline now, I couldn't see if he was dead, or staring in my direction, ready to bolt. I inched forward until his head came into view; stone dead.

An overwhelming sense of relief came over me and radioing Troy was a pretty special moment.

Admittedly I probably spoiled the surprise with the hooting and hollering that I'm sure he could hear from the other side of the valley. The spotting scopes and video had allowed us to thoroughly evaluate this deer beforehand, and there were no real surprises with what we had at our feet. Troy had tucked three rounds just behind the shoulder. The stag had still managed to cover over 100 metres and stay on his feet for at least two minutes.



Troy on the carry out. Lucky for us it was our last day and we were happy to swap boulder hoping for wet boots

That doesn't sound very long, but given the situation, it felt like an hour. Dad and I enjoyed the moment, while Troy covered the ground in record time to come and get some photos.


We dropped down to the river flats and had an unnecessarily large fire to celebrate. The rest of the trip was relatively uneventful. With a stag's worth of meat and antlers split three ways, we were happy there was nothing too technical on the creek out to the track. We

picked up the yearling and made it back to the car with the heavy loads and all the aches and pains you would expect.

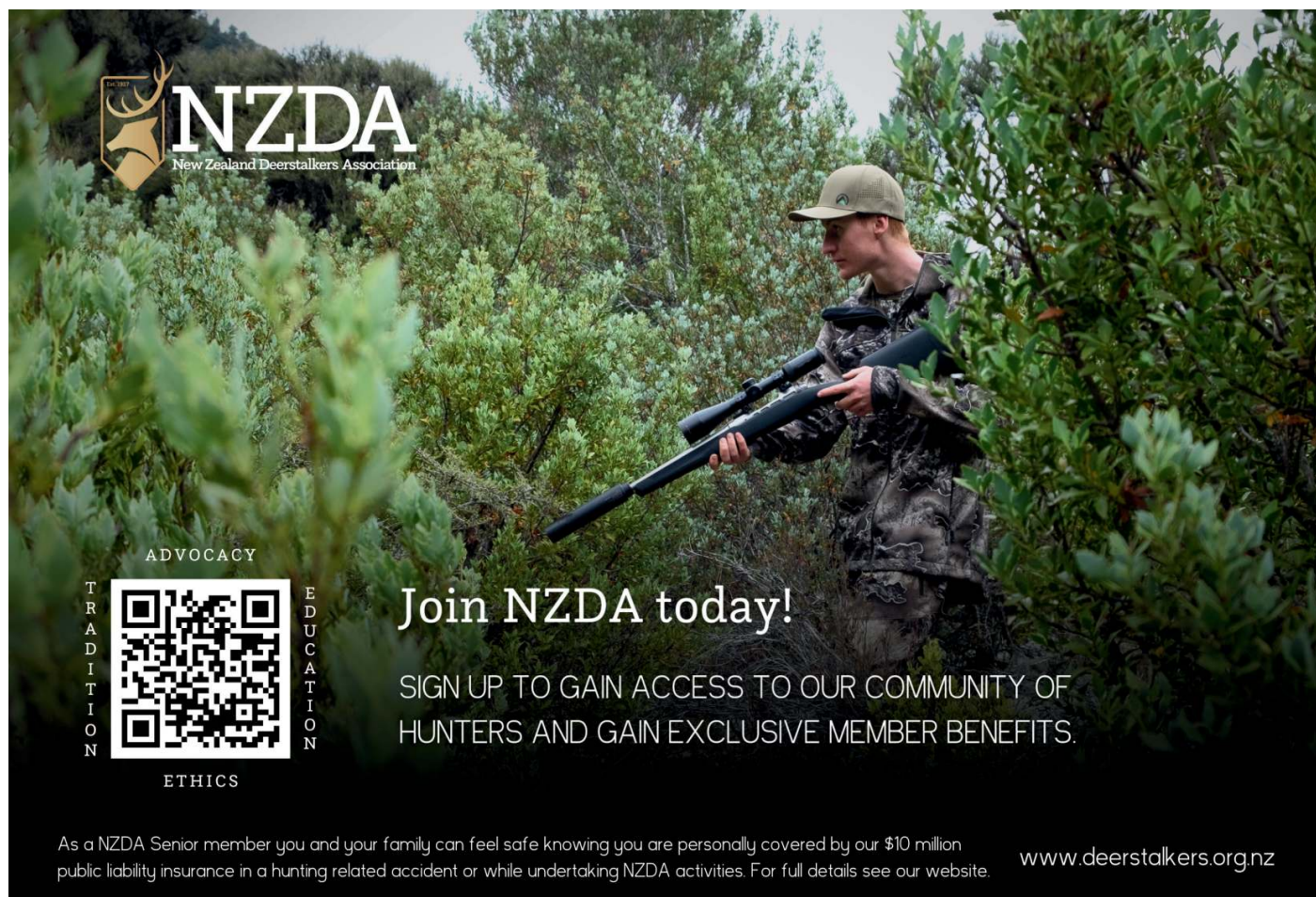
Despite feeling like we had been living in a fridge for a trip, we were rapt with how things had panned out. In five days, we had seen over 30 deer, two tahr, seven chamois and only one other group of hunters briefly at the start of the trip. **Sounds like paradise to me.**

Cold paradise, but paradise nonetheless.






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The Tikka action, Hardy barreled
7mm PRC shooting the 190gn
A-tip at 3020fps in our new
prototype high comb carbon
stock, just after executing the
588yd shot on a Sika stag



WRITTEN BY ~ GREG DULEY

PART 2

THE ULTIMATE, ALL-ROUND NZ HUNTING CARTRIDGE IS IT THE NEW 7MM PRC?

Last issue we discussed the parameters around choosing the ultimate NZ hunting mountain hunting cartridge in the most popular NZ hunting rifle – the Tikka T3

And this process lead us to the relatively new offering from Hornady, the 7mm PRC. This issue we'll continue to put our custom 7mm PRC through its paces developing loads with a wider range of projectiles. This rifle is based on a Tikka T3x action with a fluted Hardy barrel and a DPT magnum can

We've now bedded it into the prototype of our new carbon fibre stock for Tikkas, with the highest comb that will still clear the bolt handle - without having to go to an adjustable comb version with the extra weight that always adds. We've also added one of our favourite lightweight long range scopes – the Swarovski 3.5-18x44 Z5. This rifle now weighs 7.125 pounds scoped, which is about our target weight for a 24" ultralight mountain rifle.

The only factory 7mm PRC rifle we've managed to get our hands on so far is the Savage Ultralite with its 22" Proof Research carbon fibre barrel that Andrew shot a hind with last issue, and we'll work up a handload for this rifle

as well. There are also some new factory loads from Federal, including a couple with their own Terminal Ascent bonded core projectiles – a 155gn and 170gn. Unfortunately these aren't available in time for this article, but they also load the 175gn ELD-X through a collaboration with Hornady, which as you know is one of my favourite 7mm hunting projectiles.

We'll keep to Reloder 26 powder for the majority of the projectile testing so we're comparing apples with apples. This powder showed the most promise in our initial testing and it's the one I think will be best across the wider range of projectiles weights. I know this powder is highly sought after and hard to get, but

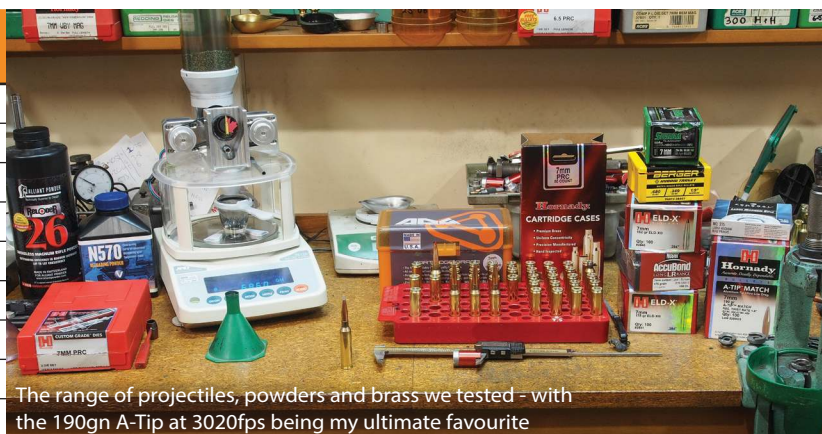
we did test the more easily obtained ADI 2217 and 2225 last issue if you can't track down any Reloder 26. **We will also try the slower burning N570 and Reloder 33 with the heavyweight 190s as I'm sure they'll come into their own there.** Federal 215 Magnum blue packet primers were used throughout the testing.

We will also test ADG brass, which is always of great quality and we expect it to take a lot more loadings than the cheaper Hornady before failing to hold a primer.

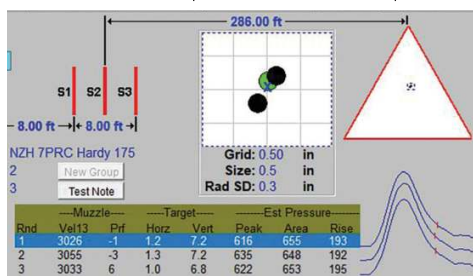
First up we'll start off with the superb Berger 180gn Hybrid, then the Sierra 165gn tipped GameKing Game Changer, the Nosler 168gn Long Range Accubond, then back to the Hornady's with their 162gn and 175gn ELD-X, and finally the best long range 7mm bullet of all time – their 190gn A-Tip with its .417G7 BC! We used to have to shoot a 300gn 338 Berger Hybrid to get a fantastic BC like this - with all the powder burnt, rifle weight and recoil that went with it.

Here are the results of the load developments and the Federal Factory load in the Tikka/Hardy/NZH/Swarovski custom 7mmPRC:

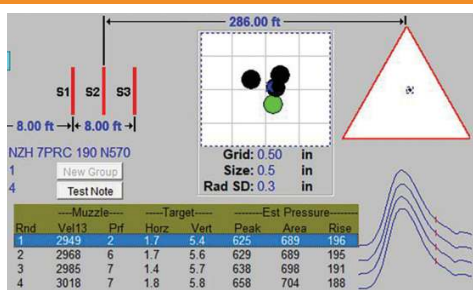
NZH/TIKKA/ HARDY CUSTOM	POWDER/GRAINS	VELOCITY FPS/ PRESSURE PSI	GROUP SIZE
Berger180gn Hybrid	Reloder 26 / 69.5gns	3022 / 64,200	.5"
Sierra 165gn T GK	Reloder 26 / 70gns	3159 / 64,800	.7"
Nosler 168gn LRAB	Reloder 26 / 71gns	3137 / 64,200	.6"
Hornady 162gn ELD-X	Reloder 26 / 70.5gns	3180 / 64,200	.6"
Hornady 175gn ELD-X	Reloder 26 / 68gns	3038 / 62,400	.5"
Hornady 175gn ELD-X	Reloder 26 / 68.5gns	3072 / 65,000	.8"
Hornady 190gn A-Tip	Reloder 33 / 78gns	3025 / 64,800	.8"
Hornady 190gn A-Tip	Viht N570 / 74gns	3020 / 65,000	.5"
Federal 175gn ELD-X	Reloder 26? / 66.8gns	2928 / 58,100	.2"!!!



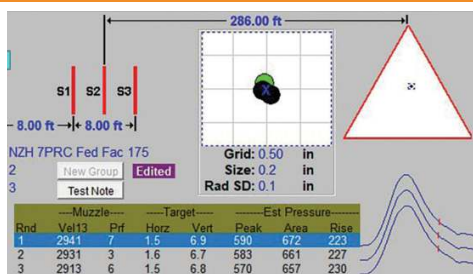
The range of projectiles, powders and brass we tested - with the 190gn A-Tip at 3020fps being my ultimate favourite



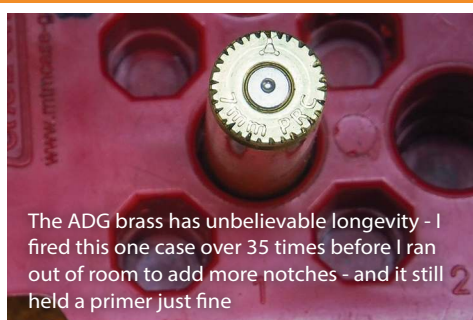
175gn ELD-X 68gns Re26 - .5 inches



190gn A-Tip 72 - 74gns N570 - .5 inches



Federal factory 175gn - .2 inches!



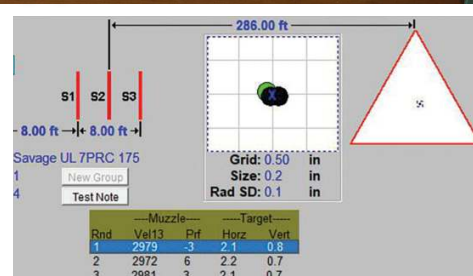
The ADG brass has unbelievable longevity - I fired this one case over 35 times before I ran out of room to add more notches - and it still held a primer just fine

Again as we proved last time, the 7mmPRC is easily capable of 3000fps with the 175/180 grainers out of a 24 inch barrel at pressures up towards but not exceeding 65,000psi. And the 162gn

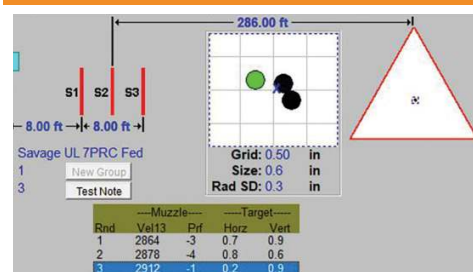
to 168gn class projectiles achieved speeds around 3150fps for the same pressure. **I was extremely pleased to see it crack 3000fps with the 190gn A-Tips – this is superb long range performance.** Interestingly this barrel shot better with N570 than with Reloder 33, which was surprising as I usually find Re33 hard to beat in the accuracy and velocity stakes. I repeated the test several times but never got larger than .5" with N570, while Reloder 33 never beat .75".

Now I did all this load development with just the one, lone, ADG case! Yep, that's what I said! **I loaded it over and over, trimmed it once after 20 rounds, notched it every time and ran out of room to put any more notches on at about 35 loadings - and it still held a primer just fine!** That is at least 6 times the case life of the Hornady brass tested last issue, so you certainly cannot complain about the value for money once you've stumped up to buy ADG in the first place. Yes, it costs about twice as much as the Hornady, but works out only one third the price in the long run. It is said to have thicker walls and head in crucial areas and therefore has less capacity, and consequently does weigh 242gns verses the Hornady's 238gns. **It seemed to need a reduction in powder charge of a half to a whole grain to match the same velocities and pressure.**

The Federal factory ammo loaded with the 175gn ELD-X performed extremely well, slightly exceeding the velocity of the Hornady offering – as you'd expect considering it has an extra .8 of a grain of what I'm sure is the same powder. I only received one packet so wasn't able to fire more than just one group through each rifle, but look at that one group! I'm sure that the average will be larger than this, but there's no doubt this Federal offering is another great factory option for the



Savage Ultralight - 175gn ELD-X 68.5gns Re26 - .2 inches



Savage Ultralight - Federal Factory 175gn - .6 inches

SAVAGE ULTRALIGHT	POWDER/ GRAINS	VELOCITY FPS	GROUP SIZE
Federal 175gn ELD-X	Reloder26? / 66.8	2885	.6"
Hornady 175gn ELD-X	Reloder 26 / 68.5	2985	.2"

7mm PRC.

In the Savage Ultralight this load did 2885fps and shot .6", so was 45fps faster than the Hornady Precision Hunter load. A handload of 68.5gns of Reloder 26 with the 175gn ELD-X seated to a Just Touch produced 2985fps and another .2" group! **This Savage is definitely a shooter and a great factory contender for a NZ mountain hunting rifle.**

ON THE GONGS

With load work done a session on gongs was next on the agenda to verify the 190gn A-Tip load I'd chosen was indeed the great long range load I thought it would be.

There was a stiff Nor-East wind blowing across my left shoulder which kept me on my toes at the longer ranges. I didn't have a custom turret/PBC for this load yet, so was using the Swarovski EL Range binoculars internal ballistics calculator reading out in clicks. Starting off at the



This Savage is definitely a shooter and a great factory contender for a NZ mountain hunting rifle



A session on the gongs with the 190gn load confirmed the rifle and ammo were up to the job!

560 yard gong, the binos said 33 clicks of Up – I held on the left side of the gong and the hits came all too easy. Even the 730 yard was pretty straight forward with 50 clicks Up and holding about 1 hash mark/2 minutes of left wind in the 4W reticle. The 1016 yard gong was more of a challenge and took some careful wind reading but 83 clicks Up and 3 minutes Left had me hitting centre. This gong is near due east, and the Coriolis effect (the spin of the earth during the bullets flight) meant dropping 2 clicks from the EL Range's standard ballistic calc. As this binocular model actually has a compass built into it, there's no reason why the Swarovski ballistic app with its Applied ballistics engine couldn't account for Coriolis too – not that it has a significant effect inside 800 yards which is more than far enough for most hunters.

ON THE HILL

Now we were ready to put some meat on the table. The middle of May is still the tail end of the Sika rut, and sure enough after climbing high to see if any older stags were out feeding up yet, I

found a youngish Sika stag still making the odd heehaw. He would have been safe from me except he had broken his right antler off below the pedicle and so his trophy potential was doomed – and he was also the only deer I saw! At 588 yards across a steep valley it should have been a pretty straightforward shot, and so it proved to be. The 190gn flew true and left a large exit wound after penetrating both lungs. The stag dropped right there, two kicks and he was done. Now the steep gully part made the retrieve a good sweat up, so I earned every scrap of venison I carried out off that animal – destined for a brew of sausages as he hadn't started putting condition back on after the roar yet.

That's all we've got time for this issue. Next time we'll progressively shorten the barrel down to 20 inch SuperPig length, and try a few lighter projectiles more suited to the reduction in velocity potential due to the shorter barrel – like the 140gn TTSX and similar. **And hopefully a few more importers will have landed their respective rifle brands in 7mm PRC for us to put a**



1016yd gong just after being hit pretty much dead centre



few more factory rifles through their paces too!

PS - In part one of this series we said the 7mm Blaser was produced in few factory rifles, brass was getting hard to find and Norma no longer lists it. Outdoor Sports the Blaser distributors pointed out that Blaser is still manufacturing rifles in 7mm Blaser, and they have a good supply of ammo and brass for it. They are trying to get clarification whether Norma are going to continue to make brass both for Blaser ammo and for the handloader. We'll keep you up to date on this when we hear more. This is still one of the best caliber options for the Blaser R8 for NZ conditions so here's hoping!



Gunnar, the 7mmPRC and the one antlered stag



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12 POINTS FOR PLAYING IT SAFE

WRITTEN BY JOHNNY BISSELL

Even when taking a break that
nose never stops working

Winter seems to be a time when a lot of North Island deer hunters hunker down and light the fire, pour a whiskey and watch hunting shows on YouTube. Let's be honest, it's cold out there and the weather is often fairly average, especially in recent times

The deer aren't moving as much and are often in bush where fewer and fewer hunters seem to hunt these days. Funnily enough, it is for those reasons that I love winter hunting, especially with my indicator dog, Sami.

There are fewer hunters about, and scent holds a lot better than when it is hot and windy, so she can track scent better. And because deer are often yarded up, when you hit fresh sign, they are often not that far away. The forest floor is quiet and less crunchy. The other plus is that it isn't light enough to hunt in the bush until after 7.30am. **So, on day hunts I get a good sleep and can then hunt all day, or until I have had enough.** You have to love that. I hate the heat too!

So, on this day, after yet another bout of rain and cold crap, the weather for the weekend was finally looking fine and sunny. As discussed, we didn't rush away at stupid o'clock. I had a

coffee and a good breakfast, and we were driving out the gate well-fed and watered at about 6:30am. **We got to the road end about an hour later, then half an hour from the wagon we were in the bush and looking for a start.** That was what we did for the next three hours. Every mark that looked fresh was turned down by the more intelligent member of the team as too old. I was like a salesman asking a client "what about this one?" Nope! That is the difference with a good dog. What you think is fresh is often a couple of days old, and it saves you a lot of dead time spent tracking it. We had one false start off the wind, which led to a dead end. It happens, and only people who don't hunt a dog think

that you simply walk into the bush and the dog does the rest. It is very much a team sport and sometimes the wind just doesn't play ball. I far prefer to hunt off the wind, as it is more direct, and obviously, you have the wind in your face as you close in. Southerlies off cold ground are way more consistent which is another tick for winter hunting.

Tracking ground scent is a lot tougher, but can also be quite productive in the right situation.

So, we drew a blank until about 10.30am. You have to keep moving and working. Then Sami lifted her nose in the air and looked keen. She looked at me, and when I indicated to her to go, she started tracking on it, with me in behind looking ahead and to the sides. A hundred metres on, and we hit fresh pig sign, which was what she had winded. I wouldn't have known it was there without her. I get a kick out of shooting pigs in the bush over her, with the added bonus that the pork doesn't look like it has been through a sewing machine. **Sami started casting around and working the scent and I did my part by standing there and keeping my mouth shut while she worked.** Then she hit the main lead and started tracking off. Off we went. The beauty of pigs is they often track straight to where they are feeding



Taking a quick break while tracking the spiker



A nice young eater from a forestry block. It did a dash of 70m after the shot with no blood trail, but Sami found it easily. Dogs add great value, fun and reward to a hunt

if it is a good feed site, and don't deviate from that much until they hit the feed zone. So, tracking them back to where they are bedded down can be more obvious and easier than deer who can mooch around all the way back to where they bed down. In the wet conditions, even I could follow the sign most of the time and Sami stayed glued to it. **In some parts such as rocky bits under mahoe, it was all her as I lost the marks.** Twenty minutes of this and about 600 metres on she suddenly put her nose in the air and started winding to the left. I was pretty sure it wasn't the same animals, but I will always go wind over ground scent and so we started tracking in. The good news was that we were heading better into the wind than across it as we had been. The bad news was that we were now heading right into the morning sun and it was square in my eyes, which wasn't ideal. Ah well, on we went. Within 80 metres Sami locked up. I stood there like an idiot squinting into the dark and sun-dappled bush with the b_____y sun right in my eyes. I couldn't see it. Until it moved. **A nice spiker was standing camouflaged in the sub-canopy mingi mingi and coprosmas, that with added sun strike, meant it was well blended.** Unfortunately, the movement was him cantering over a small rise and out of sight. Bugger. Sami gave me that 'look' and looked back to where it had been. Bugger it all again! Ah well. I had a call to make. Track the deer or go back to the pigs? Since I don't like being beaten, I decided to track the deer and see what happened. It hadn't looked too worried when it went. Off we went. The wee dog got

The best way to train an indicator dog is to hunt bush goats. Sami and I did plenty of this in her early career and it set her up well for future deer hunting



a bit excited when she hit the red-hot ground scent and a reminder was given that we are a team and to calm down which she did. On we went.

We sidled around a steep crappy face, and very soon, the deer marks slowed down. After about 100 metres the animal was walking away and not trotting. On we went for another couple of hundred metres when Sami started to get really keen and was now winding into the breeze that was still drifting down the hill to us. The marks carried on around the hill side, but I let her make the call, and we started angling up at about 45 degrees. Then the vegetation started to thin out and I got glimpses of light ahead which might be a clearing. I should add that about now, we started hitting a ton of fresh sign. Was this a winter yarding area? Sami was obviously copping

lungfuls of venison, and even I could smell it. We broke out into a steep, wee, rough bush clearing, and she swung up hill and locked up. **This time, the sun was behind me, and it would appear that it had worked in my favour for a change.** About 70 metres above me was a spiker near the top of a small rise. The bum of another deer was above and to the side of the first. Was it the same animal? Possibly? A deer in the hand..... Up went the 308 and that is where it stayed. You see, the spiker didn't have enough backdrop behind it for a safe shot. At a pinch, I could have heart shot it with the dirt behind, but what if the bullet changed its angle through the animal? Nope, not safe enough. I have been shocked recently at some YouTube videos where animals obviously on the skyline have been shot. There are



A big old gnarly ten taken at close range (like 3m) with Sami in the roar. Not that far from where we got the twelve

times when the angle of the shooter is different to the camera, but the ones I refer to were blatantly on a ridge! I nearly got hit by a bullet once that hit a couple of metres in front of me when I was bent down gutting a deer, fired by someone a long way away. **It scared the crap out of me, and I dug it out of the ground to confirm what it was.**

The spiker wasn't on to us, so we stood there with rifle up and safety on. After a minute, the rifle started to get heavy, so I slowly lowered it, lifted the bolt and took the safety off. All the while, Dog Wonder stayed locked up no doubt wondering again about the weakest

link in the team. The deer were quite content to just stand there, no doubt enjoying the first sun in a while. So, we did too.

We stood like that for about five minutes and I enjoyed watching them. Thankfully, Sami was coping too. **She hadn't even twitched. Then, as per normal, the spiker simply wandered up over the rise and out of site.** Bugger! It looked like there was a flatter spot above where it had gone, so with Sami in behind we snuck up towards where we had last seen them. As I did the sneak up, a movement out to my left had me lock on to a mature stag as he mooched around on the edge of the clear spot. The 308 came up and I took the angled shot through the back of his lungs and forward

through the chest as soon as I had it. I have learned not to muck about when in close and as soon as safe target ID is made. The stag went down on the spot. I offered my thanks once again to Mr Hornady for his excellent spire point. Spire points might not look flashy, but damn they work where it counts! In the animal! Enough of the sales pitch.

Sami looked shocked that the boss had got one over her. She had been locked on the breeze coming down from above and we twiggled the stag to the left at the same time. I didn't see the spikers again, but a six-pointer materialised out of the same place as the stag, ran to the right and stopped.

He was a sitter, but today one was enough. I was there for fun and not on the job. I will be honest and say that I didn't age the stag or count points before firing. His round rump had shown that he was in good nick, and I had a request for venison to fill, so down he went. I had got an impression of antler when I saw him, but that was about as much assessment as I had done. It can be like that in the bush.

Sami and I sat there for a while and bonded, to calm her down and also give the stag time to stop twitching. **There was no rush, and the sun was pleasant. One muesli bar later and we walked over to it together.**

One antler was in the cutty grass and I noted six nice points on the clear antler. Surely not! As I pulled the other antler clear, a spitting image (or close to it) antler came out. Bloody hell! Nice one. I checked the stag's age and came up with a mature animal in his prime. Not super old, but a big trophy would have been showing better by then. The stag was a typical Wairarapa head of the area and while even, was not huge in dimension or weight. "Pretty" would describe it well. It didn't matter as it was the best head I had shot in that particular area, and it had been a great team effort hunt of wins and losses. Did I mention that stags still being in hard antler is another reason I like winter hunting? Sami was pretty pleased with the outcome, and even more so when she got her 'treats' when I broke it down. **The head and backsteaks were taken off and packed up (when cool).** The decent set of well-conditioned hindquarters were taken off and hung up out of pig and cat

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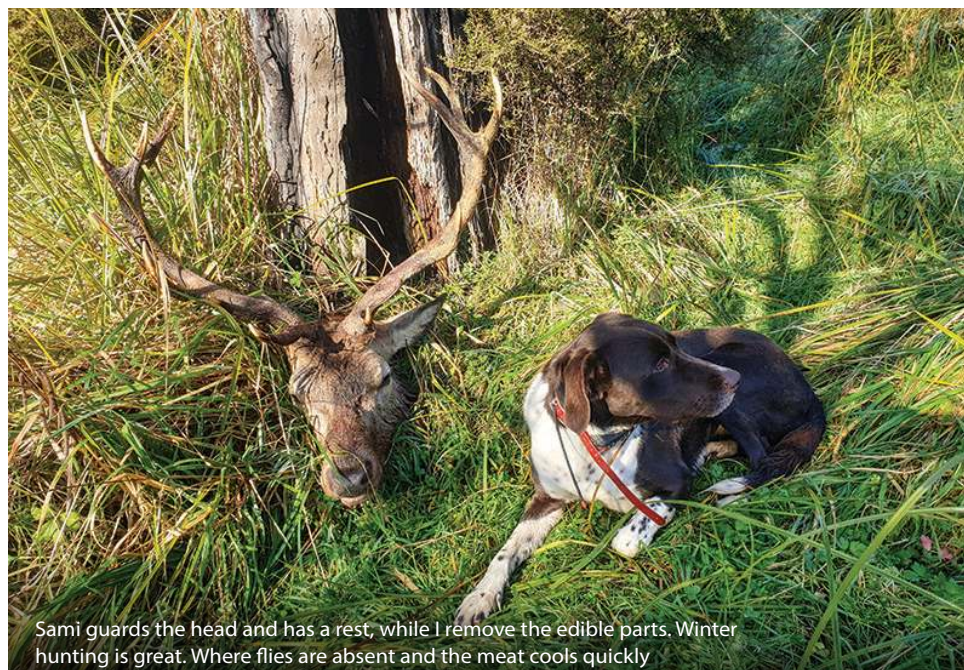
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Sami with the stag as he fell in the little sunny bush clearing



Sami guards the head and has a rest, while I remove the edible parts. Winter hunting is great. Where flies are absent and the meat cools quickly

reach to cool for a couple of days and be retrieved later. The weather was looking cold and dry and it wouldn't hurt them at all. **Did I mention that no (or hardly any) flies or wasps is another reason why I like winter hunting?**

It was a cruisy walk out with a moderate load, and I gave Sami her head to relax like the boss was.

Though she was running full-time 4WD unloaded and I had 2WD under load. Success always makes it feel lighter.

So, when it's cold outside and you entertain thoughts of staying home and getting fatter and softer, give some thought to winter bush hunting. Leave your bino bivvy at home, along with your long-range rifle, equally big scope, 40-litre plus day pack and sundry other

items you don't need. Travel light, quiet and compact like bush hunters have done here for a century. Be a bush hobbit and get into the big bush where the bell birds sing and the deer wonder what you are doing there where hunters seldom venture. **And where you really find out what sort of a hunter you are at close quarters. You will love it!**



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DAS ORIGINAL

Genetic Analysis and Archaeological Insight Combine to Reveal the Ancient Origins of the Fallow Deer

WRITTEN BY ~ DR KARIS BAKER | DURHAM UNIVERSITY

Modern populations of fallow deer possess hidden cultural histories dating back to the Roman Empire which ought to be factored into decisions around their management and conservation

New research, bringing together DNA analysis with archaeological insights, has revealed how fallow deer have been repeatedly moved to new territories by humans, often as a symbol of colonial power or because of ancient cultures and religions.

The results show that the animal was first introduced into Britain by the Romans and not the Normans, as previously believed. They also reveal how British colonial links during the 17th-19th centuries played a key role in spreading the deer around the world, including the Caribbean island of Barbuda, where fallow deer are the national animal.

The research, conducted jointly by Durham University and the University of Exeter, compares contemporary fallow deer records with zooarchaeological samples dating back 10,000 years.

Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the work has been published in two new studies, simultaneously. The 10,000-year biocultural history of fallow deer and its implications for conservation policy is featured in the latest edition of

PNAS, while Ancient and modern DNA tracks temporal and spatial population dynamics in the European fallow deer since the Eemian interglacial is published in Scientific Reports.

Dr Karis Baker, Department of Biosciences, Durham University, said; ***“Over the last 10,000 years, humans have manipulated fallow deer populations with varying outcomes.”***

“Persian fallow deer (Dama mesopotamica) are now endangered, while European fallow deer (Dama dama) are globally widespread and simultaneously considered wild, domestic, endangered, invasive and are even the national animal of Barbuda and Antigua.

“But despite this close association with people, there has been little consensus regarding their natural ranges or the

timing and circumstances of their human-mediated translocations.”

Using several hundred DNA samples extracted from both modern and archaeological deer specimens around the world – including the oldest sample so far sequenced from the UK at 130,000 years old – the researchers were able to generate an evolutionary history ‘tree’ for the animal.

The analysis revealed two distinct European fallow deer populations. The first originated in the Balkans and extended right across Southern and Western Europe during the Iron Age and Roman Empire – including to England – but today survives only in pockets of Spain, Italy and the Greek Islands.

The second originated in Anatolia and remained relatively isolated until it was brought to Britain in 1000 AD, from where it was taken around the world. A third group – the Persian fallow deer – was once widespread throughout southwest Asia but is now listed as Endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Professor Rus Hoelzel, in the Molecular Ecology Group, Durham University Department of Biosciences, said; ***“These data provide a number of fascinating insights.”***

“For example, populations in southern



Europe show indications of being stable for extended periods of time suggesting very early translocation from a likely glacial refuge in the Balkans."

Combining the genetic data with archaeological and historical records enabled the team to build a picture of how fallow deer has been translocated by people at different times and in varying cultural contexts. The animal's strong association with Greco-Roman goddesses Artemis and Diana, for example, would have driven much of its movements around the Mediterranean during the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman period.

The team identified the earliest evidence of fallow deer beyond the Mediterranean at a Roman palace in Fishbourne, in what is now West Sussex, and found evidence to suggest the animal remained in the country for several hundred years before becoming extinct. Several centuries later, deer originating from the Anatolian population were then reintroduced around 1000 AD, just before the Norman Conquest, and it was this population that, in turn, was exported around the British Empire.

This practice was referenced in the 17th century Dutch hunting manuscript, *Jacht-Bedryff*, for example, which states that Maurice of Nassau, later the Prince of Orange, acquired 100 fallow deer from England to stock The Hague Forest. Historical records also show that Anatolian fallow deer were exported to the island of Barbuda by the Codrington family of Gloucestershire, where its cultural status has changed from

symbolising colonial dominance to freedom, following the emancipation of slaves in 1834.

Naomi Sykes, Lawrence Professor of Archaeology, and Head of University of Exeter's Department of Archaeology and History said; ***"These findings overturn much of what we thought we knew about the origins and the spread of fallow deer."***

"Worshipped as Greco-Roman deities, fallow deer have been subject to repeated translocations, largely as symbols of cultural power, and this means that, today, they very much expose the limitations of labels such as 'domestic', 'wild' 'endangered' and 'invasive'."

"The authors say that the example of Barbuda, where the deer is afforded no legal protection due to its alien status – despite being the national animal – has implications for conservation principles."

Professor Sykes said: "Conservation policy is invariably based on contemporary or recent understanding of an animal's status, such as how and when it was introduced. But while many species may legitimately be labelled as invasive, this is not true of all translocated populations, some of whom are critically entangled with human history and might offer valuable



cultural heritage or a conservation resource."

Extract from *The 10,000-year biocultural history of fallow deer and its implications for conservation policy*, K.H Baker et al

Ancient dispersals of people, ideas, and animals are widely celebrated as cultural heritage. However, the more recent the migrations, the more negative the attitudes toward them. Such perceptions can translate into animal management and policy making. For instance, the fallow deer of Rhodes were introduced during the Neolithic and are viewed as a cultural asset, protected by Greek law and featured on the IUCN Red List. The fallow deer of Barbuda are equally culturally significant as the island's national animal, yet they have no legal protection and are labeled as "invasive" within the conservation literature. In truth, they are dismissed only because their introduction occurred too recently to have acquired a patina of age-based authenticity.



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BATTLE OF THE BROADHEADS

Just a handful of dead broadheads accumulated over the years. All with their own individual pro's and con's

WRITTEN BY
CODY WELLER | ADVANCED ARCHERY MARLBOROUGH

Broadheads are like beer

'What is he talking about?' you may ask... Let me explain. You have a friend who only ever sticks to one trusty brand. Nothing else, always the same. Another person across the room would never be caught drinking that particular brew. And then you have your person with five different brands in the fridge, or the craft beer enthusiasts, the ones who prefer the higher-priced options.

It's the same with bow hunters. Some hunters have been using the same broadhead since they started, while others run four different types of broadhead in a five-arrow quiver. Or there's the titanium/stainless steel-only bowhunter who has nothing but the best engineering has to offer. So, how do you figure out what style might suit you best?

Based on what I have learnt over the years, here are a few pros and cons of

each style. This topic is a sure-fire way to spark comments on any platform - just like the 'what's the best calibre' debate.

Simply put, there are two different broadhead types, fixed blade and mechanical.

TWO-BLADE DOUBLE BEVEL

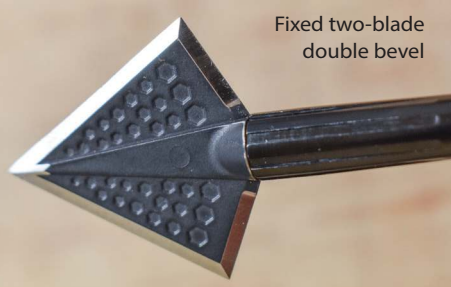
Let's start with a fixed two-blade. They have been around since day one, and while some things have changed, the basics are still there. The most standard is two-blades double bevel, the most basic and often the cheapest option. There is also the two-blade single bevel. Both are similar in shape and design, but the single bevel has a large bevel on one side and nothing on the other. Let's look at the double bevel first.

PROS:

- » **Basically, anyone can use them.** Due to their very efficient cut-on-contact design, they require very little energy to cut into the vitals. Penetration is normally outstanding.
- » **Depending on their construction material, they can be relatively cheap.** The higher quality steel two-bladers can be a bit pricey. However, the standard two piece two-blader should be an economical option.
- » **Re-sharpening can be done without too much fuss.** Some people like to and can re-sharpen their broadheads pretty well. This gives you plenty of opportunity for multiple uses, in turn saving you precious dollars.

CONS:

- » **The first thing that comes to mind can be blood trails.** Because they create a simple slot-cut, it can be easier to block the hole. Animals have multiple different layers in their hides; it doesn't take much, as they move off from the shot, for those layers to overlap and partly block the slot, causing a restriction in bleeding. Thick mud or skin can more easily squeeze back together and stop blood from coming out. There's nothing worse than knowing your animal is dead



Fixed two-blade
double bevel



Single bevel delivers maximum penetration for any bowhunter, regardless of setup limitations. (Crimson Talon Cleaver 125gr)

somewhere within close proximity, but you just can't find the blood to track it down.

» **Less blades = less damage.** It's that simple. The more blades you have, the greater the surface area you have connecting with important internal organs. Heart, lungs and the connecting pipework are always there, but if it's a 50-50 shot behind the diaphragm, things might not go your way using two-blades.

» **Arrow flight can be great with lower-profile two-bladers, but some of the bigger wide-cut options start to lose accuracy over distance.** They can end up acting as a rudder and a rudder at the front of your arrow is not ideal. They can plane the arrow off in random directions.

TWO-BLADE SINGLE BEVEL

Let's consider the two-blade single bevel. At first glance, there isn't much difference between a double and single bevel. However, the single is, in fact, a different broadhead. The simple, large, bevelled edge on only one side creates a rotation-like action. Not like a drill, but a gradual rotation through any medium. So, as it flies through the air, the bevels

gradually rotate. If your fletching is offset in the same right or left rotation, the broadhead works with the fletching, helping reduce the chances of planing.

PROS:

» **Many of the pros are the same as for the two-blade double bevel.** However, the single bevel broadhead creates more of an S-shaped cut that is harder to close up. This is caused by that large bevelled edge spinning, rather than just a slot with a double bevel.

» **A single bevel is more likely to split and crack through heavier bone, due to the rotating action, that pries apart muscle, tissue, and bone.** This could be the difference between punching right through the shoulder or not at all.

» **In my experience, singles have greater accuracy.** The broadhead's slow rotation seems to work with the fletching to help to stabilise the arrow.

CONS:

» **While they can produce more damage than a double bevel, it's still only two blades.** When fewer blades are involved, the broadhead has more opportunity to slip past something vital.

» **Single bevels can be relatively pricey compared to double,** although construction doesn't seem that different.

» **Re-sharpening can be more challenging.** Because of the one edge, it can take some work to figure out how to get them back to razor-sharp.

FIXED THREE-BLADE

Now we'll look at Fixed three-blades.

There are a lot of variations in three-bladed broadheads; multiple different tip designs, blade shape, blade retention or one piece. For the most part, any of the well-made and well-known brands are very good. Three-blade broadheads almost penetrate skin and muscle with the same ease as a two-blade. Large bone is slightly more challenging though, and this can use up a bit more energy to break through compared with a two-blade design. Most of the packaging says field point accuracy. This is mostly true; however the big wide models will start to plane off if your fletching isn't adequate to stabilise them.

PROS:

» **The triangle cut is very good at letting blood flow.** This type of wound channel is more likely to stay open than a two-blade model.

» **Small, compact three-bladers generally have great accuracy.** They still create a nasty little wound channel,

Good old-fashioned 3-blade, hard to fault really! (Grim Reaper Hades Pro Series 3-Blade 125gr)





A compact 3-blader is an ideal choice for boars with thick skin, plenty of penetration and a better chance of a good blood trail. (Grim Reaper Micro Hades Pro Series 3-Blade 125gr)

therefore, more noise during flight. More blades can also result in it being more difficult for your arrow to punch through hard objects.

MECHANICAL BROADHEAD

Mechanical broadheads are, perhaps, one of the most debated options. Love them or hate them, I have had some excellent results, but also some questionable ones. The most common or well-known would be the rear-deploying models or the blade-over models. Both are good options. Mechanicals create massive wound channels. Two-inch two blades or two-inch three blades sliding or folding into the open position and cutting their way through is a lot of devastation. All this takes energy and momentum, so not everyone can use mechanicals. You need a bit of spear power to get the best results from a lot of mechanicals. I would think 55lb plus and it definitely helps to have a 27" draw length and above to be on the safe side, especially anything in the two-inch cut category.

PROS:

» **As mentioned, the wound channel is pretty devastating for mechanicals.** Even the smaller-cutting diameter mechanicals are extremely nasty. This devastation means if you don't get your arrow placement exactly right, you still stand a good chance of finding the animal, especially if the shot is back a bit. The broadhead just cuts that much more, so you're more likely to hit and damage something vital.

» **Accuracy. Most of the mechanicals under a two-inch cut diameter are pretty compact during flight.** They are more likely to behave like your field point than anything else. This can help with high-pressure situations or long shots where pin-point accuracy is a must.

» **Some models are very quiet in flight.** With the blades tucked away in the ferrule and just a couple of tabs sticking out, there is minimal air rushing past. Couple this with a ridged vane setup and you have a very quiet arrow flying through the air. This helps reduce how much an animal reacts to the sound of the arrow before it arrives.

The added bleeder blades transforms a simple 2-blade single bevel into a 4-blade. (Kayuga Pilot Cut 125gr)

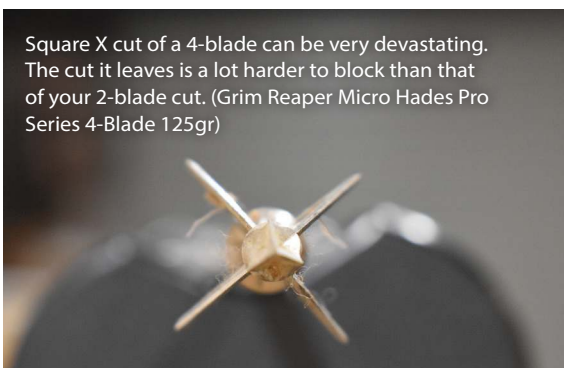


difference between a perfect clean kill or not.

» **Some of the one-piece models can be tricky to resharpen, as it can be difficult to get the angle right to achieve the proper edge back on the blades.**

Some injection-moulded models I would consider to be relatively blunt from new. You want your broadheads to be as sharp as possible.

Square X cut of a 4-blade can be very devastating. The cut it leaves is a lot harder to block than that of your 2-blade cut. (Grim Reaper Micro Hades Pro Series 4-Blade 125gr)



FIXED FOUR-BLADE

Fixed four-blades are popular. The four-blades are similar to but usually shorter than a three-blade, and at a steeper angle. They create an X-cut that is extremely difficult to block up. This almost square wound channel works well,

but the steep-angled blade does take a little extra punch to get through and can soak up a little bit more penetration than a three-blader. Other broadhead models are more like a two-blade, but with two extra small blades off the ferrule - sometimes known as bleeder blades. These act much like a two-blade head, but with that little extra cut to help with blood loss and the added chance to cut something vital. This design takes much less energy to pop through something but doesn't deliver that nasty X cut like the blades of the squarer model.

The pro and cons of a four-blader overlap with those of a three-blader. The obvious upside to four-blades is the more blades, the bigger the mess (generally). However, when you have more blades you have more vents -

which makes them a great option for longer shots.

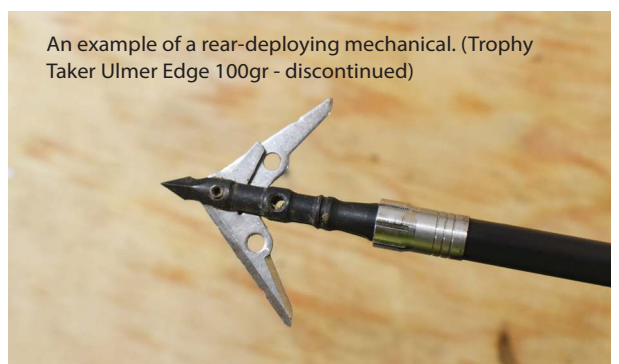
» **Many three-blade models have a replacement blade system.** This ensures you have brand-new razor-sharp blades if you want to get multiple uses out of that broadhead.

CONS:

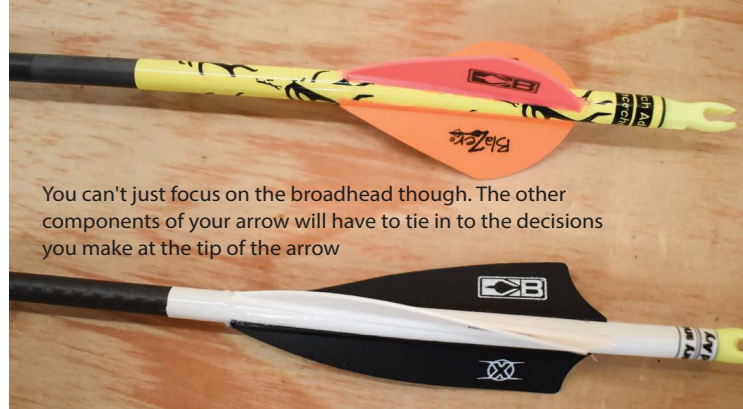
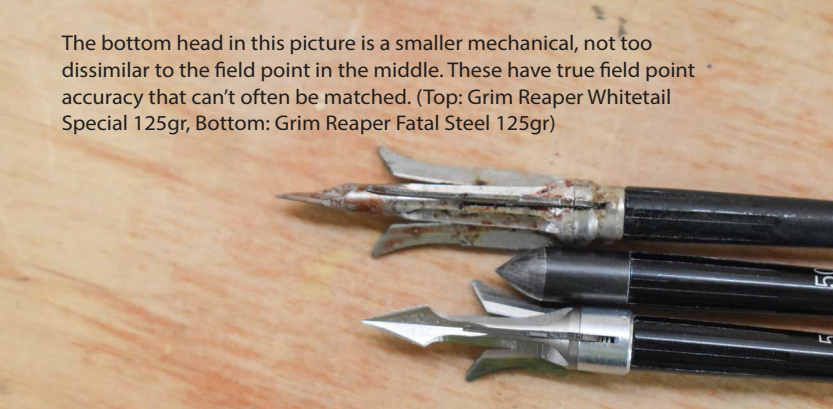
» **A lot of the replacement blade models have a groove for the blades to slot into the ferrule.** Usually, some kind of retention system holds the blades in place. These small slots in the ferrule can weaken the broadhead. The majority of them are still very strong, but it's a slight chink in the armour.

» **Vented blades in a three-blade broadhead can make a little more noise during flight.** This hissing sound racing towards an animal can make them react. This can sometimes be the

An example of a rear-deploying mechanical. (Trophy Taker Ulmer Edge 100gr - discontinued)



The bottom head in this picture is a smaller mechanical, not too dissimilar to the field point in the middle. These have true field point accuracy that can't often be matched. (Top: Grim Reaper Whitetail Special 125gr, Bottom: Grim Reaper Fatal Steel 125gr)



You can't just focus on the broadhead though. The other components of your arrow will have to tie in to the decisions you make at the tip of the arrow



The massive 2" cut of a 3-blade mechanical is rather impressive. (Grim Reaper Whitetail Special 100gr)

CONS:

» **Punching mechanicals through an animal's body takes a lot more energy.** Therefore, penetration can be an issue if the arrow has to travel a long way through the body before it gets to the vitals. Bone can cause issues regardless of

your setup, but mechanicals suffer the most from a bony impact and can sometimes fail.

» **The longer the blades, the longer and skinnier the ferrule has to be.** This is often accompanied by a long slot through the middle of the ferrule to hold and hide the big, long blades. This can mean bending and breaking is more common, and these broadheads can be a bit of a write-off before they have even completed the job in the animal.

» **Just because it's a mechanical doesn't mean it is field point accurate, although the smaller, more compact ones can be.** But once you get into the big cutting diameter jobs, there is still a lot of blade sticking outside the ferrule. This makes them more like a fixed-blade broadhead as far as flight influences are concerned.

So, it's definitely worth checking out the big ones before heading into the bush.

After that breakdown, the question on your minds has to be: what broadhead do I have in my quiver? Currently I'm using the single bevel - simple and strong. I predominately hunt Reds and pigs, plus I often find myself targeting big, mature fellas. So, the accuracy and the outstanding penetration they provide is hard to overlook. These are closely followed by a compact three-blade fixed broadhead. Again, they deliver pretty good results with minimal fuss. **No matter which way you go, there will always be multiple pros or cons to consider. You just have to play around with your options and find one that has the right pros for you and your bowhunting.**



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Ever Decreasing Circles

Finding and Cultivating Your Own Spots

WRITTEN BY ~ DONO GIBBS

Camping out on my birthday. A hind and yearling secured on the meat shelf of the pack for carry out

A private message popped up in my inbox

I'd just posted another story on the Hunt forum about a recent hunt at my local, resulting in a healthy young hind joining us on the trip back home. A new hunter had noticed I'd had some success and wanted to know which track I'd taken in.

The discussion continued over a couple more messages - to his credit, the questions stopped short of "where is your Spot X?" but he circled dangerously close. I pondered this young hunter's dilemma, thinking about the challenges of starting out, no doubt wondering what to do and where to hunt? I felt somewhat envious, for he was at the very start of the "process". If it became an experience he embraced, it would result in a tremendous amount of satisfaction as he began to find and cultivate his own spots, building experience and expertise along the way.

adventures and learnt heaps about dive techniques and hunting different types of fish. My ultimate goal was to shoot large, moocher snapper. It took time in the water, and a few pairs of worn-out fins to become proficient. So, when I first took up hunting, I realised I was at the start of another big learning process. One I was going to enjoy - learning bushcraft, how to live out of a backpack, dealing with adversity, and hopefully to harvest animals. There was no rush to get to the end of the process, this was one to be enjoyed.

The Process

After moving to Auckland years ago, I became heavily involved in spearfishing with a group of mates. Together, we formed the Axemen Spearfishing Club, and had huge

Finding Your Hunting Grounds

The first thing we did was to hunt far and wide across many areas around the central North Island. Countless hours were spent stalking in the bush of the Kawekas and Kaimanawas, chasing

wiley Sika. We donned heavy packs full of old hiking gear and climbed to the tops, glassing for hours, trying to find animals. Tops hunting in summer proved productive as we learned the places to park up and glass.

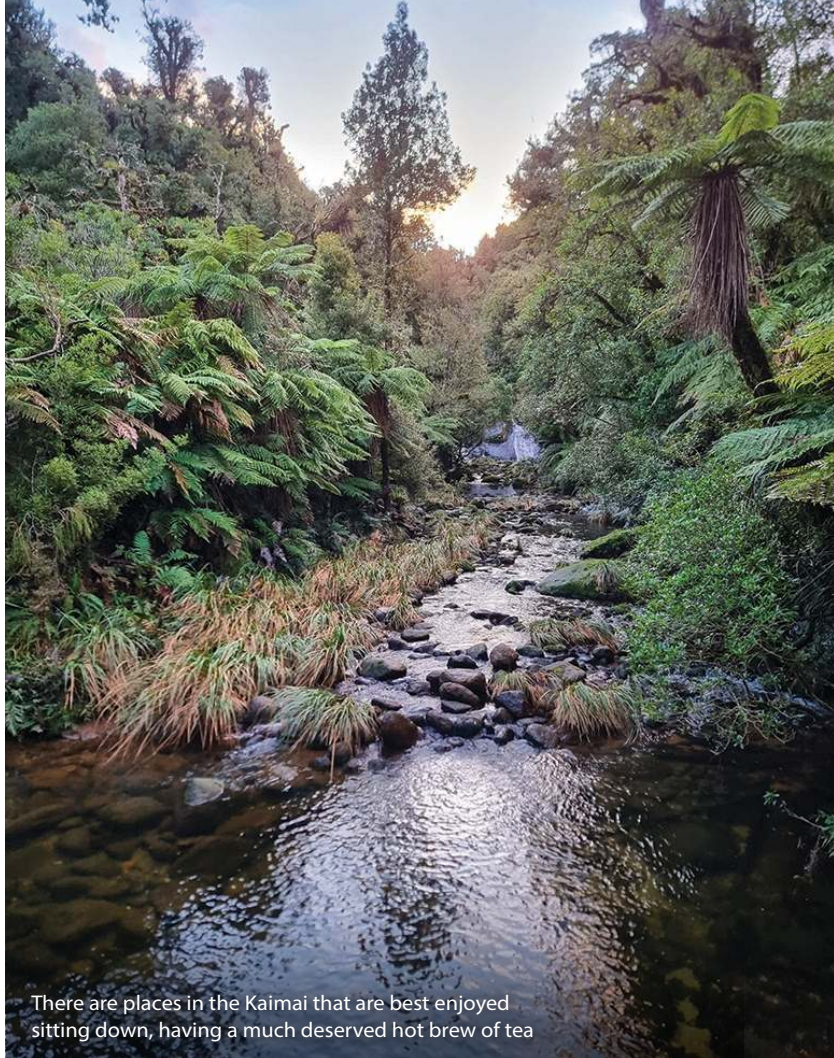
But bush hunting did my head in. I spent day after day wandering around the bush off Clements Road and around the Oamaru. Occasionally, while weaving through the bush, I'd be rudely awoken from on-the-feet slumber by the squeal of a departing Sika. Hours upon hours were spent gazing fruitlessly through dense, green jungle. I was not only learning how to hunt, but also the basics of bush navigation. Then, one day it happened. Sneaking along, sun behind my back through pristine native forest beside the Oamaru River, a gorgeous Sika stag gracefully appeared from a ledge and cantered unaware toward me. I remember the sun's rays highlighting his pristine red and white coat, as he lay only three paces away.

Investing In An Indicating Dog

A couple of my Axe buddies had acquired pups and put them through



Kai indicating there is potentially an animal below. He isn't locked up here, so we have some distance to cover



There are places in the Kaimai that are best enjoyed sitting down, having a much deserved hot brew of tea

the Deer Dog Training Blueprint programme. I watched with deep envy. A year later, we welcomed Kai - a male Vizsla/German Short-haired Pointer pup, into the family. Pointers are famous for their activity levels, crazy fitness and zest for life. I guess we made a good pair. The timing was fortuitous, as it was the first Covid lock-down. This meant I could train him daily at local areas in central Auckland. Twelve months later he was ready for his first hunt.

One of my hunting mates regularly points out that I have a natural advantage using an indicating dog, and there is some truth to this. **But, a quality indicating dog just doesn't happen. It's a big investment in terms of patience and training time, and then to develop him over the next few years. It changed how I hunted.** When I was hunting solo in the bush, my hunting style was completely different, with more time spent sitting still or glassing slips. If you are an active hunter, teaming up with an indicating dog is great fun. As Kai set about his work, I noticed that he was teaching me to become a more proficient hunter - how to pick up sign, when to follow up on animals, when to slow right down, and when not to. At times, I could almost visualise animals moving through the fern, noting the length of marks Kai located and his speed of follow-up.

Finding A Local

But what we were missing throughout this time was a "local" hunting spot - somewhere relatively close that we could day hunt. We needed this for a couple of reasons. First, to ensure we were able to get out for a hunt each month to keep up our fitness. And second, to help our hunting development. The closest spot, the Kaimais, is infamous for its thick, impenetrable jungle. Our first trip was a real eye-opener. We left at 3am and hunted in the eerie post-roar mist. Kai had taken me through a couple of supplejack thickets, indicating keenly. Trusting the dog, I followed. Then he motioned toward another gut and we heard what I thought was the sound of hunters talking. We immediately sought cover behind a log. I was tempted to call out "hunter", when we heard some movement, and a spiker stepped into view five paces away. Placing my shot, we secured an animal on our first trip in. And with that, we learnt two things. First, the Kaimais were actually huntable, and second, we wanted to come back. And so we averaged a day trip every month or so for the next two years. We had modest success, getting onto deer most of the time, and we bagged a hind and a young pig. As it turned out, talking to other hunters, this wasn't a bad ratio!

Ever Decreasing Circles

Our strategy on each trip was to hunt a new section off the main track to find threads we could move through and hunt effectively. Kai would often indicate into deep guts covered in sprawling supplejack. Fruitless hours would be spent feeling out of control, fighting to get back to the main track. But we would also find new punga areas, active game trails, the odd trapper's trail and areas of open commute with plenty of sign. We learnt that ridgelines often provided easier routes to other sections, and gave Kai height to wind down into gullies. I tended to push the pace too much, and many days we returned having spooked an animal or two. One winter's morning, Kai was vindicating strongly (winding animals up ahead). We had crossed a small stream onto a bench with plenty of fresh sign. I was tired from an early start, and standing, I fiddled needlessly with my Garmin. Glancing down at Kai, I noticed he was sitting, staring intently at a tree only two paces in front of us. I glanced up at the tree trunk and a deer's rear quarter was sticking out from one side. Drawing the rifle awkwardly to my right side (I'm left-handed) to try to get an angle on the deer, I missed the shot on the fleeing



A young hind shot in the heat of December. She was feeding on a grassy ridge in heavy wind as we hiked up hill. She never saw us



There is nothing better than giving your meat time to hang in a tree in the cool above flowing water



A mature hind taken in wet, windy wintery conditions. We spooked her on a grassy ridge and followed her tracks down into a thick gully

wallows, punga belts, game and cut tracks. Inevitably we stumbled across hunter's camps, left untouched for the next roar. These provided overnight options, as well as areas to avoid during the roar. Finding tracks and game trails were invaluable for easier commuting between areas. Marking out the main walking tracks and understanding their orientation toward north, also provided peace of mind, knowing I could navigate back using a compass if required.

Wind, Rain and Location

I also learnt that while wind is everything, it is also not everything, as contradictory as that sounds. But, depending on where you're hunting, the prevailing wind may not be much of a factor. What I found was that in the bush each gut often had microcurrents working through.

This is the same for animals, which meant keeping calm and following up on Kai's windications. I learnt that later in the day, during the winter months, we could work the lower slopes and Kai would pick up imperceptible katabatic currents silently rolling down the hill as the sun dipped below the range. Kai picked up such a scent late one winter's afternoon, resulting in a successful stalk across a stream and then up a gut to a bedded stag.

We also learnt that the animals would often be very active moving and feeding on windy, rainy days. I could only surmise that the noise and movement provide the animals with a sense of cover and protection. A light rain jacket is a good investment here. We also noticed on

those days that we would bump deer in a particular section of the valley between two ridges on our walk in later in the afternoon or, sometimes, in mid-morning. My best guess is that this is a transition point between areas with plenty of feed.

Time of Day and Year

Bush hunting provides the luxury of a late start if you want it. Animals will be moving during the first and last light hours and, in the warmer months, will be bedded down in the middle of the day. I've found this a good time to have a break to eat lunch and rehydrate. Stalking in summer, often in crunchy conditions, has taught me to slow right down and hold dead still at regular intervals, listening and looking when Kai is showing interest. Hunting after rainfall helps during these months. Winter is an excellent time to hunt with conditions soft underfoot, the stags in hard antler, and fawns able to fend for themselves. We've found that deer will tuck up on the slopes in sunny spots, protected from the wind, so sidling in steep terrain has been productive.

Taking Time to Ponder

I've found it beneficial to concentration to take regular breaks throughout the day. On colder winter days I pack a small Toaks alcohol stove and titanium cup and lid. It's a fun way to prepare a hot cup of coffee or brew a nice tea, and enjoy a light snack. It forces you to stop, sit down, and unpack the day in your mind and perhaps more importantly, to slow right down. It also helps to keep you hydrated, which will aid your body's performance and recovery. Berocca Sport is great as a cold drink at the start and end of each day to keep up your

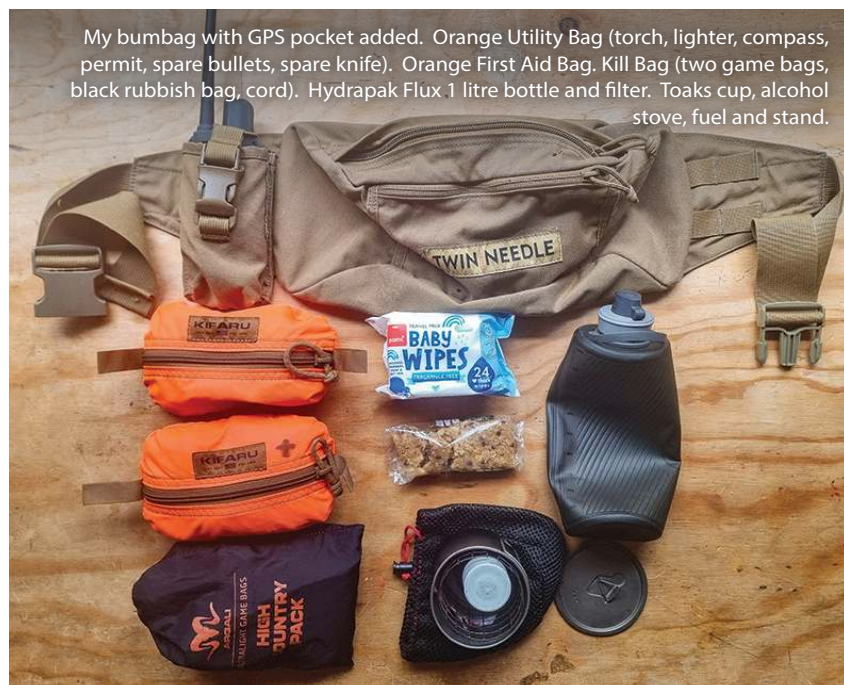
animal. That was the only encounter of the day and I was just devastated to have blown an opportunity. But we'd found a nice new open spot to return to, with plenty of sign, feed and punga for shade and bedding.

Topography

Slowly we linked threads and built a picture of the topography of the areas. I looked for wider bands on the topo maps. These flatter areas potentially held easier grounds to hunt. I also looked for mature tree stands when commuting on tracks, which might indicate more open hunting below. I marked areas of interest with my GPS. I used symbols for animal encounters, areas of sign, scrapes,



A quality backpack with a separate meat shelf makes for much more efficient and safer carry outs. The load is positioned against your back, the main bag straps on top. A couple of boned out stags came home that day



My bumbag with GPS pocket added. Orange Utility Bag (torch, lighter, compass, permit, spare bullets, spare knife). Orange First Aid Bag. Kill Bag (two game bags, black rubbish bag, cord). Hydrapak Flux 1 litre bottle and filter. Toaks cup, alcohol stove, fuel and stand.

electrolytes. A break also provides the time to attune to your environment and enjoy being out in nature. I feel as though this flows into the way and pace I subsequently move through the bush. Hydration equals concentration in my view. And you need both concentration and the ability to be patient and stand dead still for minutes on end, when the dog is on a strong point.

So What Pack?

Bringing home fresh, quality meat is important. In my experience, the more traditional fleece pikau bags are not kind to older shoulders, and I've had one fall apart under weight. Smaller day bags generally do not have good harness systems, so your shoulders will suffer if you load them up. As I am mostly hunting overnight and many hours from the truck, I need a quality backpack to get meat out. A superior design with a meat shelf enables the pack out of a couple of boned-out Red deer comfortably over longer distances. If we are day hunting, I use a home-made fleece cover for the main bag and sleeves for the pack waistbands to compress the contents, protect the pack and soften the noise. If overnighting, I will stow the main pack at camp, and clip on a bum bag to hunt with. This is compact, light and stealthy, which is useful when weaving through thick bush. Inside the bum bag I store a kill kit (a knife with quality steel, cord for hanging meat, game bags and a black rubbish bag), first aid kit (medication, plasters, celox clotting pads and Israeli



My pack compressed down and covered in a home made fleece bag cover and sleeves. I use this on day hunts. It provides a stealthy option with a separate meat shelf for a heavy carry out if required

bandage), utility bag (torch, head torch, permits, lighter, cord, compass, and spare bullets), a muesli bar/chocolate bar, and an empty Hydrapak Flux water bottle and filter for water on the go. If I want the option of a hot drink, a Toaks cup and lid, bottle of methylated spirits (fuel), alcohol stove and titanium spoon are added. Oh, and tea, coffee and snacks of course. Should we put an animal on the deck, it will be hung on the bone to cool, then boned out into a game bag, ready to be picked up later.

Attached to the bum bag is a GPS holder, which safely secures my Garmin Alpha 200i. It helps me to keep tabs on Kai who wears a Garmin TT15 e-collar. The handy vibrate function allows me to reinforce distance, and compliment hand and voice commands. It comes with inReach



Following a deer trail, we heard the sound of pigs from behind. Sitting still, we waited, and sure enough a couple of young porkers trotted across the opposing face

satellite communication, Birdseye (Google Earth type imagery) and imported Topo 40 imagery. I can reliably get three full days out of the TT15 collar, but carry two spare batteries for the Alpha 200i which will use up a battery on a full day's hunting.

Packing For The Pup

I find it helpful to keep gear and food lists for different hunts. I need this as I'm managing both myself and the needs of my hunting dog. For Kai, I pack a puffer vest, or an additional quilt and a cut-down Thermarest foam pad for him to sleep on. He has a single coat, and needs the extra warmth, as he is prone to losing weight. For food, I pack larger serves of his dog biscuits and, if we are successful, he gets the liver and offcuts. This calorie rich food helps him to maintain his weight during an active hunt.

Kai had winded 100 metres ahead, but I wanted to hunt up a ridge. He circled us back to the spot where we picked up the hind and yearling feeding unaware on horopito



Real dog backpacks are awesome on longer trips. Kai only ever carries his dog food and jacket. Remember, only introduce them after the dog is past 16 months - bones are set then. Train them like you would with lighter weight, and I never load him up beyond 10% of body weight. If your dog has a single coat - add woolen seat belt covers to the straps to stop chafing

also provided time for reflection, and to piece together the clues gained throughout the day as to how the animals spent their days here. Now we had more time to hunt, at a much slower pace, in more open, huntable areas. As we naturally started to slow down to a more effective hunting speed, and paused frequently, we had more animal encounters. We started to piece together how the animals moved between the main ridges and the valley below, often at the oddest times of day.

Finding Our Spot X

Things really changed for us last April.

Adopting the familiar strategy of exploring new areas each trip, we'd had a particularly frustrating morning - busting through brush and spooking a deer in tight flax. Opting to head back to the main track, I tried to navigate us toward a slip we'd found on a previous trip. Fighting our way through head-high vegetation, we burst through onto a ledge, directly above the slip, spooking

a hind and yearling staring back up at us from ten metres below. I managed to drop the hind with the trusty 223. The rest of the day was spent exploring, finding a massive wallow system and eventually linking up to the main track, spooking a couple of deer on the way.

Over the next six months, we explored this new, open area and the hills surrounding it. Finding a variety of old and current campsites and did a few overnights. This was great fun, and gave us time to relax at the end of the day. It

This was our local spot, and hard-won. Now, on each trip, we will extend the boundaries and explore new areas as part of our overall hunt strategy. It's so rewarding building your area and animal knowledge. So, next time you are battling to find a new spot, remember every scrape, bruise, and empty game bag at the end of each trip has you one step closer to finding your Spot X. It's only a matter of time. So take the time to reflect and enjoy the process along the way!





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In my eyes it's a key ingredient to a backcountry trip. It adds a layer of adventure, and it's a break from the 9-5; a disconnect from emails, texts and notifications. And an opportunity to strip life back and focus on the basics. It's how it's always been, but it likely won't be the way it always is

In an age of constant advancements in technology, the disconnect is slowly being connected. We had a sneak peek at that reality last winter when we set off on a 4WD deer hunt to the back of a Canterbury river armed with a Starlink dish.

Six of us met at Harry's early on Friday morning, eager to make the most of a long weekend. My brother-in-law William had flown down from Auckland for the trip - I was happy to finally repay the favour of an adventure after a few spearfishing trips up his neck of the woods. Old schoolmates Raddy and Robbie can never say no to a mish, so they joined the group. Tony from TrackMe also came along, armed with some incredible technology - the Starlink being one piece of that. When planning the trip, Tony asked what the 4WD track was like and whether he could tow a trailer with a quad on it. It had been a couple of years since I'd been in the area, but I remember it being a bit of a highway, driving well past the hut with little trouble. "Should be right... I think?"

Turns out that you don't pay all that much attention as a passenger. We rolled up to the hut without a jockey wheel or any lights on the trailer - the wiring was ripped apart, and it took a hammering on its underside. Whoops. Tony quickly brushed it off as we admired the beautiful country we were in.

Another group of hunters were leaving as we arrived; they'd had a pretty relaxed hunt, not venturing far from the riverbed. The only deer spotted were up high, something we were expecting given the distinct lack of snow this far into winter. **It was a classic Canterbury backcountry valley - matagouri scattered flats were framed by the steep beech forest coated valley walls.** Above the bushline were patches of tussock amongst crumbly bluffs and large scree slopes. Having made good time, we split off into pairs and set off in different directions to hunt the day away. Robbie and Harry ventured upriver to explore the next side creek. I wanted to take William up to a hanging valley behind the hut where I'd had some luck on a previous trip. Raddy and Tony hung back for a relaxing afternoon, settling in before aiming to hunt the flats on last light.

My memory of the climb had been about as accurate as my description of the 4wd track I'd given Tony. We didn't head far enough up the creek before climbing the valley wall. It started off bloody steep, the kind of climb where you're

using your arms about as much as your legs. The gradient eased after about 20 minutes, but this led us into thick mānuka regrowth. I bashed on ahead, eager to break out into more open country. The young trees were about two and a half metres tall, and aside from the occasional deer or pig tunnels, they were completely closed in. We eventually found a small clearing with a good view of the tops. William took the opportunity for a 'leg break', so I started glassing. He had lost one of his legs from just below the knee in a climbing incident on Mount Ruapehu, so has to keep the stump dry to avoid chafing. **There's one hell of a story behind that, which I'll touch on later.** It didn't take long to pick up a pair of stags bedded on the skyline. There was no mistaking them - two sets of antlers silhouetted against the high cloud. They were a long way up, but seeing them filled us with confidence for the hanging basin. The only problem was the band of bluffs standing between us and the promised land. After three failed attempts to pick our way through them my memory of the climb was starting to come back more clearly. We started sidling around the face towards where I'd climbed it those years prior. When we saw the 40m waterfall crashing down the next gut it all came back to me... "oh that's right, there's an easy way up on the other side of that" I laughed to William. There was no way across, so we took one last stab at finding a way through the steep stuff which thankfully proved successful. With the short winter days, we had lost too much time to get a closer look at the skyline stags, but the hanging valley was now in view.

We picked up a young Red stag out in the open acting strangely; a hind then fed out from the bushline behind him. The young stag lost his mind, chasing her around the hillside, posturing to her as if it were April. We couldn't believe our eyes when he caught up to her and tried mounting her - it was mid-July! To top it off, he let out a roar when he spotted another mob of five hinds feeding up from the tussock below. Other than that, we spotted three middle-aged stags mobbed up out the back, and a promising-looking chamois on the skyline. **William wasn't too worried about bagging meat as he was mainly there to explore some country and look for a head if one presented itself.** I tried talking him into taking one of the hinds because my freezer wasn't looking quite as healthy. With our light almost gone and two days left up our sleeves, we decided to start our return to the hut instead, probably for the best. The headlamps came out halfway down the hill, and we fluked it down to the riverbed between two ~ten metre vertical rockfaces on the river's edge.

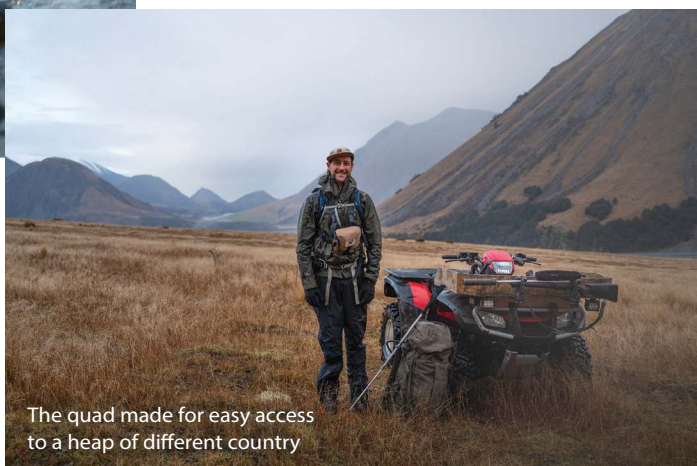
When Tony said he was hanging back to settle



Harry crossing the main river flow



Tony's impressive setup



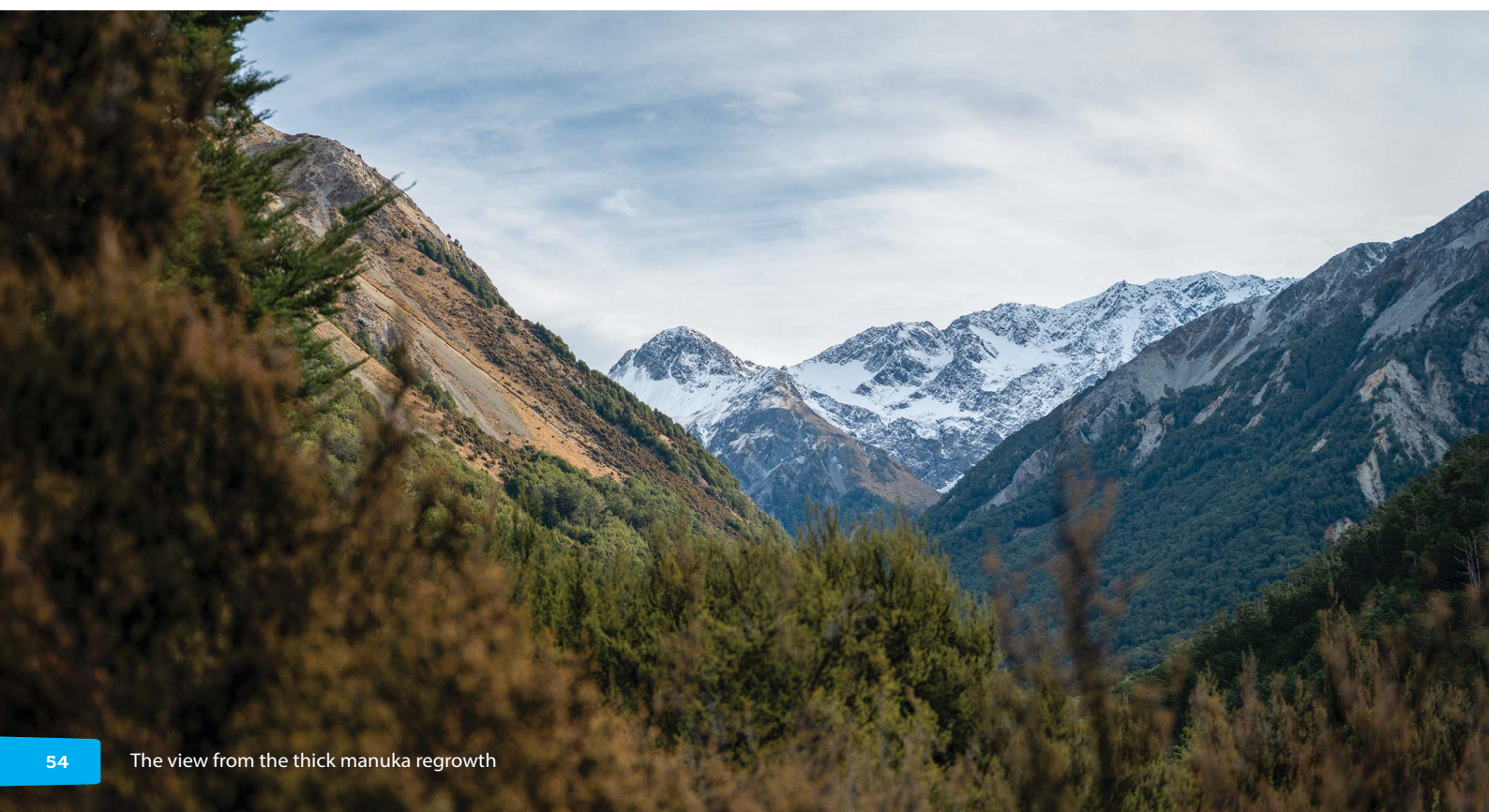
The quad made for easy access to a heap of different country

in, he wasn't lying. We returned to a hut with light bars wired up to the rafters, and all we had to do was flick a switch. **On top of that Starlink was set up offering Wi-Fi with speeds better than you'd get at home. I was happy to leave my phone on airplane mode - the last thing I wanted to hear was my phone going off.** But more to my taste Tony had also made us all a sausage casserole for dinner, bloody good bugger! The boys had also been busy. Harry and Robbie had climbed up the side stream and managed to knock over a young hind in the tussock basin out back. They spotted it from inside the bushline, Harry sacked it with a good free-standing shot at around 50 metres. By the looks of the footage, they scaled some sketchy country on their way. A pretty entertaining contrast to Raddy's unsuccessful solo effort. He popped out

for the last hour of light for a relaxing cruise on the quad to watch some faces downstream. Going into the trip, only Raddy and I knew everyone, and we spent the night sharing stories around the crackling fireplace getting to know each other. We were all in high spirits knowing there was a meat safe half full of venison hanging in the brisk winter air.

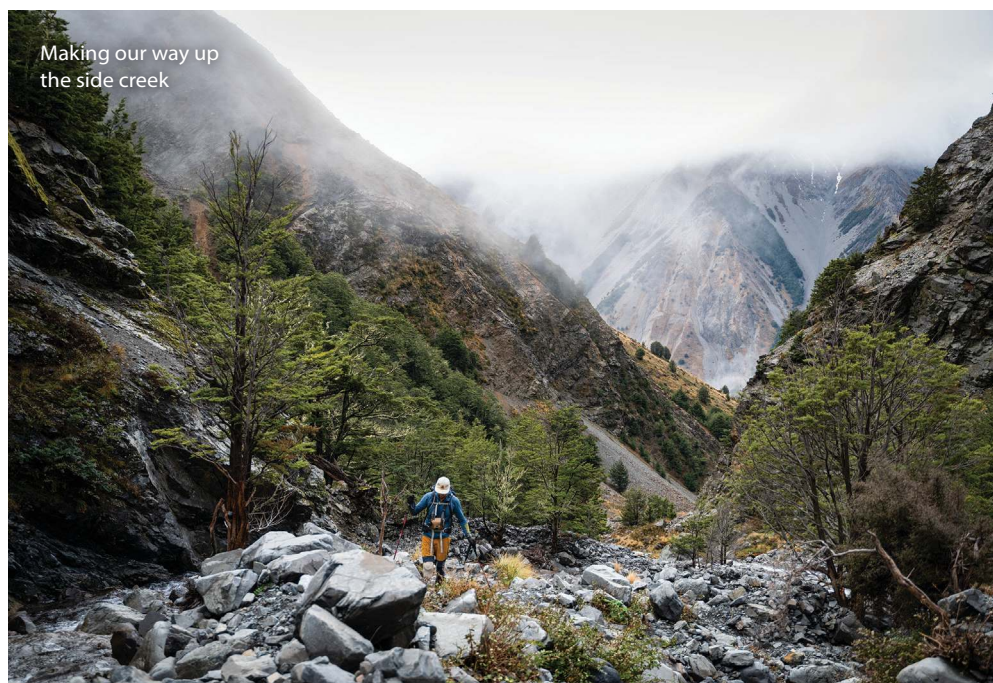
The forecast held true as the rain set in overnight. The weekend's weather was looking average, but with William's flights booked and the effort of trying to organise six full-time workers to get the same weekend free a little bit of rain wasn't going to derail the trip. We hatched some plans and set off when the rain cleared late in the morning. Tony

was eager to take the quad up the valley and see how far he could get. **Harry, Robbie and Raddy climbed up past where William and I had hunted the previous night, hoping to reach new country.** William and I set off downriver to hunt another side creek. A large motivator for the trip was William wanting to see some new country, and he was eager to cover as many new spots as possible. We wished each other luck as our three groups set off in different





Despite his injury William is keen to take anything on



Making our way up the side creek

directions.

I continued to be impressed by William's capabilities and attitude as we set off from the hut. We had to hike down valley a few kilometres before starting the climb up the side creek. **The rocky creek bed was all untracked and slippery underfoot from the morning's rain and brisk winter air.** On top of that we had to cross the stream a handful of times - a tough task to find solid footing under a prosthetic foot. It made me realize how much we rely on our sense of feel to assess stability before taking each step. For as long as I've known William his attitude has never faulted, a dead keen outdoorsman set on seizing the day.

After a few hours of climbing, we could see the tussock faces I'd wanted to hunt out back. Pockets of mist had held on from the morning's rain with patches of clag building up behind us. Our weather window wasn't forecast to last all that long, which meant we couldn't stick around all evening. We picked up a small group of deer bedded high up on the face - a couple of spikers and hinds.

They didn't have the headgear to convince us to close the gap, and William was still convinced his freezer hadn't gotten any emptier since last night. We glassed for about an hour and cooked up some lunch to refill the tanks. Unfortunately, the clag set back in mid-afternoon, so we didn't get to watch golden hour.

The fun part about splitting up on a hunt is the excitement of hearing how your mates got on. Yet again Harry and Robbie had got the job done, this time with Raddy around to film the process. It

sounded like there was some confusion when it came down to it - Robbie was getting settled behind the trigger with three deer in range. "Which one are you going for" Raddy asked when setting up the camera. "The one on the left", Robbie replied before squeezing off the shot. Harry called out, "Reload", as the deer he was watching (the one on the left) stood there unfazed whilst Raddy called out "Sacked it". It turns out Robbie had lined up the middle of the three with a perfectly placed shot on a sitting deer that rolled it over in its place. He hadn't seen the deer standing broadside 20 metres to the left. "Why the hell did you go for that one!" Harry laughed afterwards.

Tony had made it to the head of the valley and scoped out some likely-looking flats for a return trip once they green up in spring. We settled into the hut with a hot meal and a roaring fire to watch the Warriors take on the Eels in the NRL. We absolutely thumped them, the

perfect end to a great day in the hills... up the bloody wahs. It was a strange feeling hearing live sports commentary in the backcountry. A great novelty, but it definitely changed the feeling of an evening in a hut after a hard day on the hills.

William and I were up early the next morning to take Tony's quad halfway back to the road to explore a new creek. **It was our last morning of the trip, so the rest of the crew opted for a relaxed morning watching the All Blacks take on Argentina in a warmup for the World Cup.** The haka was bursting out the hut door as William and I set off down river. The battle cry would've made for a great metaphor if William and I had knocked over an animal. It's too bad that the only deer we saw were way above the bushline and out of reach. I'd finally convinced him to knock over an eater if we'd spotted one. The boys cleaned up the hut and picked us up on the drive out to close out a bloody enjoyable weekend



Robbie with his deer that rolled over in this spot



The morning rain had cleared but a low mist stuck around

in the mountains. We all came away with some veni for the freezer and a couple of new faces to call mates.

The Starlink was an interesting insight into the potential future of our backcountry. With the way technology is improving, it's a given that our remote places won't be quite so disconnected. Whether that's through a complete cell network coverage or other means like the transportable Starlink dish, it's a seemingly unavoidable future.

One of our great walks already has Wi-Fi established at one of the huts. I know that if I had hiked for hours or days on end to reach a remote spot and arrived to live sports being streamed or the sounds of phone notifications, I would be looking for a place to camp. Rainy days or long winter nights in huts are often my favourite parts of a hunt when viewed in hindsight. Although I'm sure I'd rather be hunting and exploring the area at the time, it offers a chance

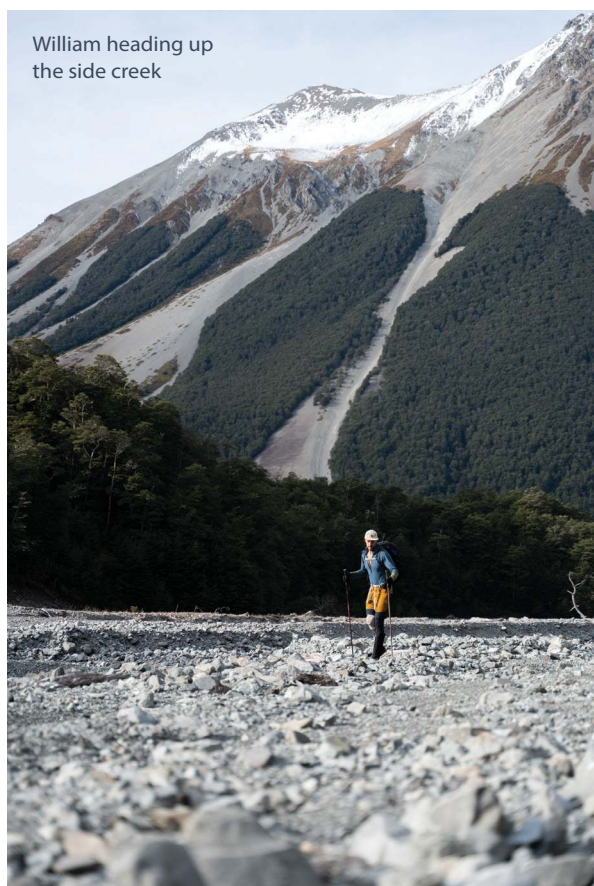
to relax and unwind. If you're hunting with mates, it's a time to catch up with each other's lives that become less entwined as the growing responsibilities of work, relationships and families take priority. **The isolation and, at times boredom, is becoming a rarity. Being disconnected offers a break we don't always realise we need.**

But it's not all doom and gloom, and there are plenty of positives coming with this technology. The obvious perk is the

safety net it provides; easier access to help if you come unstuck. Back in 2007 when William was climbing Mount Ruapehu, this connection wasn't so simple. To cover the story briefly - William and his friend James were climbing Mount Ruapehu in early spring. They were spending a night at the Dome Shelter near the top when the volcano erupted, spewing mud, ice and rock down the side of the mountain towards the shelter. William was caught in the debris and pinned to the floor, leaving James to take off down the mountainside to find help, luckily



We didn't have enough time to cover much of this creek



William heading up the side creek

finding a ski field worker initiating a rescue mission. It's an incredible story of survival, and if you want to know the full story, William wrote a book about the experience. Even the title speaks to his unrelenting optimism - 'Every Day's a Good Day'.

Although it's a rather extreme example - given those circumstances a better connection to emergency services is a no-brainer. When it hits the fan in the mountains, the consequences are often at the extreme end. Being able to call for help can scale down the extent of the repercussions. Hell, a broken leg in the days before technology would likely see the end of you. Nowadays, we can hit that SOS button and wait patiently for a helicopter to come to our exact location. My complaints about a lack of isolation lose their validity when weighed against safety. There's probably an argument to be made that it may lead to more risky and reckless decisions under the assumption help is not too far away. In the end, it's still a dangerous place where the wrong decisions or bad luck can be fatal.

Technology has come a long way over the last ten years; from personal locator beacons to InReach devices that can send out a SOS ping or a message from just about anywhere. These devices are

becoming more common, affordable and reliable. Tony has created a business around improving remote safety for workers and adventurers alike. It's nice having a local team that are familiar with how the systems work within New Zealand just a phone call away. The Starlink dish opens up remote working for him; he can run events like multi-sport races in the backcountry and still stay connected whilst keeping the participants under a watchful eye.

In my mind there's no doubting the backcountry is going to be more connected than it is today. I'm sure the


perks will outweigh the negatives, and ultimately, it will be up to us as to what technology we use and how that affects our adventures. I'm sure the hunters of old would already call us soft with the advancements in our gear and comforts we now call essentials. The old deer cullers' idea of isolation would be months on end without seeing or talking to anyone. I can only imagine isolation to that extent would easily turn to loneliness. **Modern technology is making isolation more comfortable and more enjoyable, but how far can that go before the feeling of isolation is removed entirely?**



The view up valley

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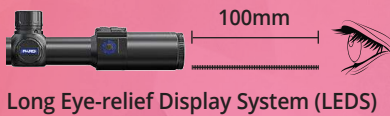
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WINNER



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Paul Nickson with a Fallow buck taken using a Sako 85 Finnlight 2 in 308



2

Max Williams (10) with his first stag, an 8 point Sika shot at 250 meters with a Tikka Strata in 6.5 Creedmoor. He was absolutely stoked, you never forget the first one!

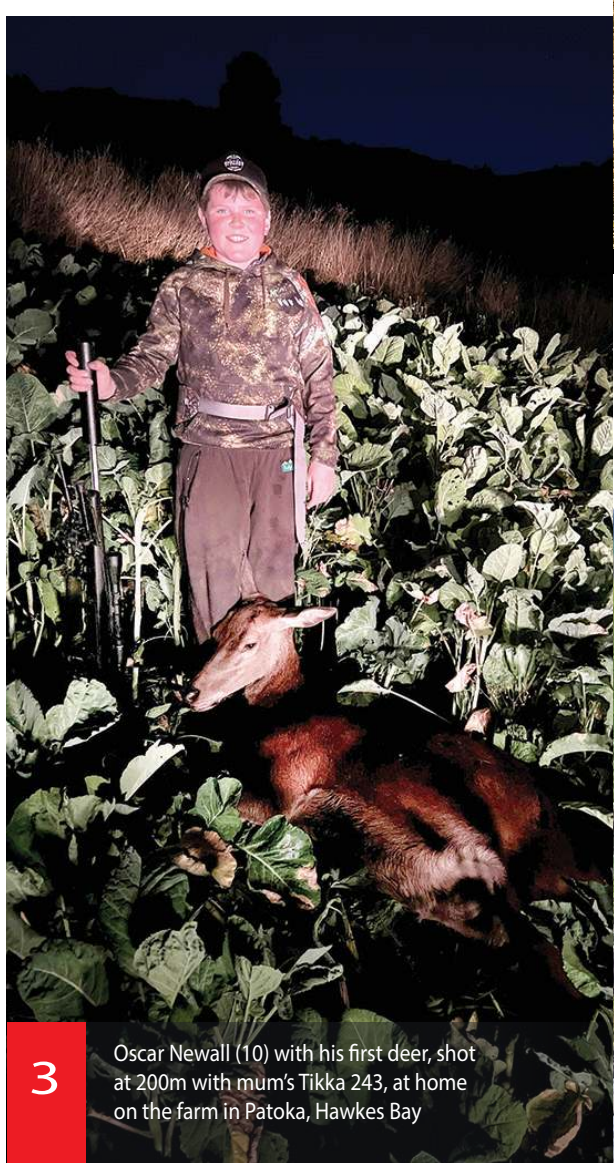
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3

Oscar Newall (10) with his first deer, shot at 200m with mum's Tikka 243, at home on the farm in Patoka, Hawkes Bay

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Jorja Brettell (11) with a Tikka T3X 308 and her first Red deer

4



5

Connor Toulmin's stag from the 2024 Roar, taken at 330 yards using a Tikka T3 Strata in 6.5 Creedmoor



7

Caitlin Cook (8) shot her first stag and was super happy with her 11 pointer. She roared him in close and got him with Dad's Sako 223



Jack Cater (13) and his first stag, shot from 400m using a Tikka T3X 7mm Rem Mag. A big 13 pointer

6



A TALE OF TWO RAMS

WRITTEN BY | BRANDON MCMURTRIE

SPRINKLED ALONG THE SHORES AND SLIPS ABOVE CERTAIN RIVERS IN THE CENTRAL NORTH ISLAND YOU CAN FIND FERAL MERINO SHEEP IN DISCRETE LITTLE POCKETS. ONE OF THE RARER GAME ANIMALS IN NEW ZEALAND, THESE SHEEP ARE THE REMNANTS OF HERDS THAT WERE FARMED IN A FREE-RANGE MANNER IN THE 1800S AND ALLOWED TO GRAZE RIGHT UP ONTO THE OPEN TOPS



Once farming became more disciplined in the early 1900s, most of these sheep were mustered back into properly fenced stations. However, the wildest of these sheep were left behind, and they formed small flocks which have sustained themselves to this day.

They now haunt shores and scrubland in small, secretive groups and spend a lot of their lives traversing scree slips and rocky bluffs above river gorges; the kind of country which would make a chamois dizzy.

I had no idea about any of this until my older brother, Dan, got the opportunity to work on a station that had a small herd of wild Merino roaming its farthest reaches. He got permission to hunt them while he was there and shot a big, beautiful ram, as well as a few meat animals.

As soon as I saw his ram, and even more so once I tasted some of the lamb he shared with me, I was obsessed. Not only is lamb and mutton some of my favourite meat, but his big ram called to mind the game sheep of the Americas, like Dall's sheep or the Bighorn sheep. **I not only desperately wanted to shoot a big old ram, but a supply of wild lamb would be a great addition to my primarily wild-game diet.** I knew it

might be a big ask, as their numbers are quite low (especially on public land), and they can be surprisingly hard to hunt. **As Jack O'Connor, America's greatest wild sheep hunter, said** "A deer that has been shot at will go around the side of a hill and lie down... A ram will leave the country".

The problem was that Dan's private land hunt was likely a one-time thing—or at least we didn't want to be greedy and ask for access again so soon—so we set about researching where we might find some sheep on public land. Dan already had some idea, and combined with my research, we came up with a plan and found ourselves heading into public land on a scorcher of a day in early January.

I stupidly decided to buy a new pair of boots the day before our hunt and to break them in on the hill. Additionally, they were a style of boots that I don't usually wear. So, within the first hour, I could feel blisters growing on both heels. **The hike in only took around three hours, but it required covering some miles and a considerable descent, which really took a toll on our quads.** As we meandered on shaky legs along the final flat towards camp, we spooked two sheep from under a small terrace in the bush, not 50 metres from where we would be sleeping!

We dropped our packs in camp and followed in the direction of the fleeing sheep, but within half an hour we found ourselves corralled by the unbelievably dense and frustrating bush out onto a bluff above the river. **Having made an absolute racket of swearing and bush bashing, we gave up and returned to camp.**

That evening saw us ascend a short but very steep 300 metres to reach a lookout we had discovered on the edge of a moderately sized rocky slip with a good amount of summer feed. At this point, my heels felt like they had worn to the bone in my new boots, and it was only



Dan's Merino ram



Little flags left behind. A sure sign you're in the right area!



Blisters on the first day, and no good plasters!



the first day! While we were sitting on the slope, we were mostly focused on a large face that had many scree chutes and scrubby spurs, broken by bluffs and rocky outcroppings, where we saw quite a few sheep including three mature rams.

The face that held the rams was so steep, and was composed of so many chutes, slips, folds, spurs, and little bluffs that we were unsure how exactly we were supposed to hunt it. Not to mention that we were both already incredibly sore, and my blisters were beginning to pose a real problem when it came to climbing. On such unsteady legs, climbing the opposite face could easily end in disaster. As we sat and talked about how we might hunt that face over the next few days, we heard a quiet bleat not far off, and within half an hour, a ewe and a lamb poked out onto a spur, not 100 yards below us. We decided not to shoot them as it was our first day, and our main goal was for me to get a ram.

The next few days passed in much the same manner. We would climb to the

lookout, with me on raw heels taped with electrical tape (yes, I forgot to bring good plasters). We would see the rams on the far side – in a new spot each time – and we would have a few ewes and lambs coming out around us, almost always within 100 yards.

Our game plan was to wait and hope a ram came out on our side and, if we had no luck, to shoot a couple of ewes and lambs on the last day. Unfortunately for us, no rams appeared, and on the last day we saw no sheep! So, we were faced with a considerable hike home with empty but still heavy packs. We weren't too fazed, as it was mostly a reconnaissance trip. We knew that trying a new spot and attempting to find and learn about new animals often requires a few "unsuccessful" trips. Mostly, we were just super excited to have seen a good number of animals.

Over the next few weeks, Dan and I would look at our photos and develop a strategy for hunting that big face. It involved travelling down the river, finding a way onto one of the rocky spurs, and

climbing up into the ram country where we would wait until evening for the rams to pop out. We would just have to cross our fingers that they happened to be exactly near where we ended up, or else we wouldn't see them in all the folds and chutes.

Dan wasn't available for any hunting for a while, but I was determined to get a ram, or at least some lamb, hogget, or mutton! So, I returned with a new crew, comprising my other older brother, Reon, and a friend of mine, Ride. I was the only one completely obsessed with the sheep, so we all had an understanding: I would have priority to shoot any good ram we came across, but they could have priority to shoot anything else, and we would all share the meat.

The trip felt cursed from the beginning. The weather was much worse than forecast. It poured with rain and the river was swollen, not ideal for crossing, and travelling downriver would be difficult. The wind was also absolutely hammering mine and Dan's little slip, which was supposed to be our main hunting base

for the trip.

We spent most of our time bush stalking instead. Reon and I ran into three sheep heading towards us on a game trail not 100 metres from camp. It was a comical scene; the confused sheep and I locked eyes, equally surprised to see each other, with maybe 30 yards separating us. My rifle wasn't even loaded yet as we had barely left camp! I slowly loaded and raised it, but the sheep were in a gaggle, and I didn't want my bullet to pass through the first sheep and wound the one behind it, so I had to wait. **Just as they were about to bolt Reon bleated at them in an attempt to pique their curiosity, but it only reassured the sheep that we weren't to be trusted. They bolted.**

One morning before sunrise, Ride took the toilet shovel and went to take care of business. As he set to digging his hole, he spooked a sheep from its bed and it ran up into camp, right past Reon and I enjoying our morning coffee.

It turned out that the only fine night to be had up at our lookout was the last night of the trip. It was all riding on this hunt. As we climbed the small rocky face to our possie, we heard a lamb in the bush bordering our slip, bleating for its mother. The lamb continued to cry for a while but soon went silent, and they never showed. We were gutted. That might have been our last chance!

Regardless, we settled in for an evening of glassing. Reon faced down and across our slip – the direction from which all the sheep had approached – and I decided to face backwards for a while so my face was out of the sun, watching the very top of the slip over his shoulder.

After an hour, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a slow flash of white. It looked like something slowly swinging its head, looking from left to right in a cautious scanning motion. It vanished again. I said **"Reon don't move. I think there's a sheep up behind you"**. I saw another flash and knew it was indeed a sheep. Reon turned and got a glimpse of it in his binos as well. It was all on, each of us prickling with cautious excitement. The sheep was travelling downhill, following the bush edge we were sitting on and coming directly for us! I told Reon, **"just shoot it, even if it's a ram, you just shoot it, you're all set up"**. I didn't want to go home empty-handed again; it's mostly about the meat and the experience for me anyway.

Right then it walked between two trees, and we got a clearer view of it – a ram and a big one! Reon backed off his rifle, gesturing at me and saying, **"na bro, you wanted a ram, it hasn't seen us, you**



My old boy. A hard life left a few scars

shoot it!" We switched places, and I got behind his rifle. The ram stepped out from behind the final few trees and into the open. Not 50 yards from us, he looked huge, both in body and horn. It was a beautiful sight. As he paused to graze for a second, I shot him, and he dropped instantly, rolling off the edge and down onto the scree slip. He tumbled for a bit but got caught against a small rocky outcrop with some kanuka scrub on it.

What a feeling! I was shaky with adrenalin, and we all just stood and marvelled at what had just happened. If I hadn't been facing backwards, looking up behind us, that ram would have walked right up behind us, given us both a fright, and

most likely gotten away. It was just pure luck that I happened to see him while he was still a way out.

We scrambled over and down to him. He was even better than I hoped. He bore scars, old and new, across his face. He was clearly an old battler, doing it hard in this rough country. He wore his thick fleece only about his neck, shoulders, and back and was strangely bare on his underside. His horns had nicks and notches taken out - from what, who knows.

Everyone I talked to said not to bother with ram meat, but he was the only sheep we got, and I was so grateful to him that we took his meat - two hind quarters,



Brandon and Reon with the trophy ram



A ked. A tick-like parasite that lives on sheep

a shoulder, and his back steaks. One shoulder was ruined by the shot. If he's tough, well, I guess I'll have tough meat for a few meals. **Though he looked huge on the hoof he was surprisingly small bodied, especially once butchered.**

He had quite a few sheep keds burrowing around in his wool. Keds are a type of

wingless fly, creepy little things resembling a tick, which live on sheep and parasites them just like a tick. As I understand it, they don't pose a risk to humans, but they are quite off-putting, especially because you don't often see such parasites on other game animals in New Zealand.

These wild sheep might just be my new favourite game animal, perhaps only because they are new to me. But there is something so unique about them. They were once semi-domesticated, and they escaped re-imprisonment only by making their home in some seriously inhospitable spots and quickly turning wild. In the subsequent decades, they have probably

changed a lot, behaviourally and genetically, from their farmed ancestors – for example, in the fact that they now only seem to grow long, thick wool on their backs, and have bare undersides.

So after two big trips and ten days on the hill, I finally got my ram, and what a ram he is! Dan measured him, and he went for an unofficial Douglas score of 72. Dan's private land ram was about 74, so he has me beat there. But I love my ram,, it's my absolute favourite trophy. When comparing our rams, you can clearly see the difference in quality of life between the public vs private land animals. My ram displays all the indicators of a brutal life, with scars on his face and big chunks taken out of his horns.

The great American sheep hunter Jack O'Connor wrote "The mountain sheep keeps his horns as long as he lives, and on them he writes his autobiography. He records his age, his species, his good years and his bad, and his battles". And what a story my ram tells!

We ate some of the meat, and it was delicious! We roasted a hind quarter the way you would roast a lamb leg, and honestly, I couldn't tell the difference between it and normal mutton. Tender and delicious. I'll definitely keep the meat from any future ram I shoot!



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HEIGHT

12.5cm - 43cm

WEIGHT

600g

LIZ SCOTT FWF AND F&B

WRITTEN BY | HANNAH RAE

THE FIRST COLD SNAP OF WINTER HAD DESCENDED ON FIORDLAND AS I JOINED LIZ SCOTT IN HER LIVING ROOM OVERLOOKING LAKE TE ANAU. WITH HANDS CRADLING COSY-HOT CUPS OF TEA, WE GAZED OUT TOWARDS THE CLOUDED PEAKS THAT LATER CLEARED TO REVEAL A FRESH DUSTING OF SNOW

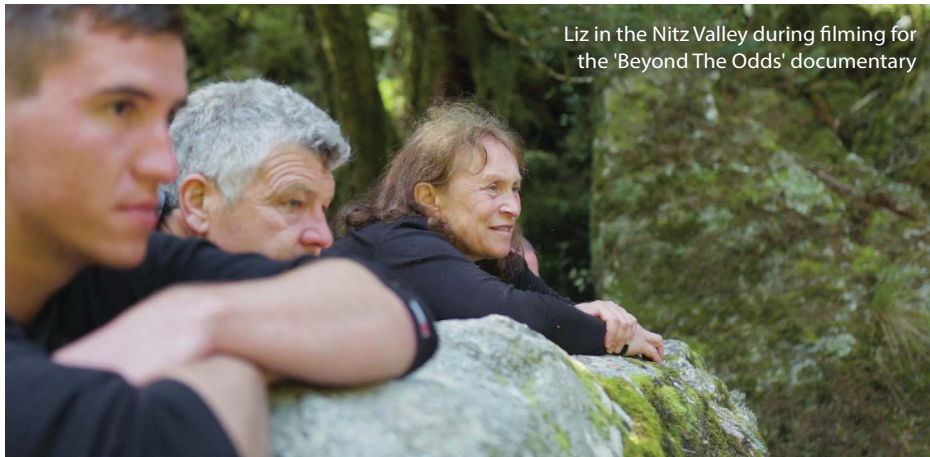
Liz is a local GP and outdoor enthusiast, whom I first met through being a patient of hers at the medical centre after moving to the area two years ago.

Many months after our first meeting I was, I admit, surprised to see her face pop up in Beyond the Odds – the behind-the-scenes story of the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation – where she declared she'd initially thought of hunters as a bunch of yobbos. I was immediately intrigued how someone with this perspective could undergo such a turnaround to then become so heavily involved as to be the trapping co-ordinator with the Foundation. Lucky for me, and for all you

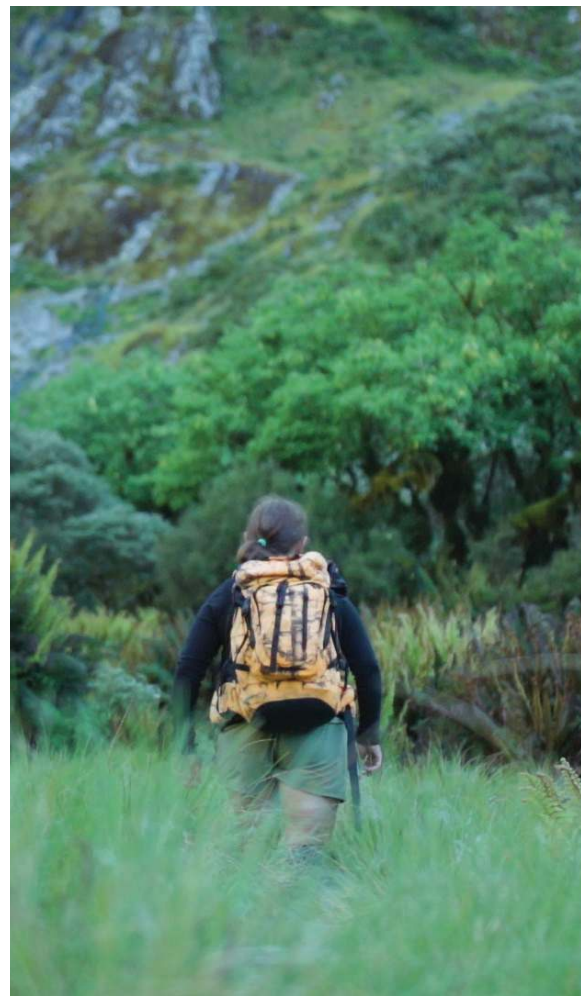
readers, Liz was more than happy to share her thoughts and experiences.

Then, just as we were settling in for our chat, she casually mentioned she'd been a Forest & Bird member since the mid 1980s (when Prince Harry was still in diapers). Given the current legal stoush between the FWF and F&B my eyes just about popped out of my head, and I thought this is going to be even more fascinating than I anticipated.

** Within 48 hours of my conversation with Liz it was announced that Forest and Bird (F&B) and Fiordland Wapiti Foundation (FWF) have come to an agreement such that F&B are pausing legal proceedings so they can negotiate further.*



Liz in the Nitz Valley during filming for the 'Beyond The Odds' documentary



LET'S START AT THE VERY BEGINNING, WHERE DID YOUR PASSION FOR THE OUTDOORS ORIGINATE?

I grew up in Britain and I had my sixteenth birthday on the plane on the way out to NZ. I wasn't particularly outdoorsy or fit when in Britain. Towards the end of university, I became involved in tramping, and went out with a chap who was a keen backcountry trumper.

In between finishing uni and starting work in Te Anau, I worked as a guide on the Routeburn - and that's when it was a lot more basic than it is now. I really liked getting off track. I originally came to Te Anau just for nine months, but I fell in love with the place and Fiordland so I stayed...and I kept on tramping.

HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED WITH THE WAPITI FOUNDATION AND STOAT TRAPPING IN THE WAPITI AREA?

One of the previous trapping coordinators must have had a bit of trouble getting enough volunteers for the runs. So, he asked the tramping club, of which I was secretary (and still am), if anyone was interested in being involved.

I'm always keen to see a different area, and love meeting different people that I wouldn't normally meet. I went along and really enjoyed it; it's a beautiful place.

Over the next few years, several folk took on the organising role and I went along on many of the trips. One day I was asked if I'd like to start organising, as I'd been doing the data recording for a few years by that point.

I think they'd realised I like to be methodical, and I'm quite good at recording things. Of course, in my job [as a GP] you've got to be fairly precise. So, for about four years now, I've been co-ordinating the eight trapping runs that go from September to May, while the

trapping manager on the FWF committee takes care of the trap maintenance and replacement work.

A note from Hannah: Liz was exceedingly humble about her efforts. However, I feel it's important to highlight the level of commitment this role entails, particularly for those who haven't been involved with volunteer trapping. For each of the eight trap runs per season there's at least a day's work per trap run of pre- and post- organising, not including the day if Liz does a trap run herself.

Before a trap run there are multiple weather forecast checks, organising helicopters, communicating with volunteers, sorting bait (sometimes chopping meat to bait size), packing gear for volunteers, and inducting any new volunteers. Then, afterwards, there's gear cleaning and sorting, managing data and sending summaries to DOC and FWF, and loading results onto Trap NZ.

Liz joked that folks might view her involvement with both F&B and FWF as spying between the camps, but I think it's clear that her dedication to the Wapiti Foundation's mission is unquestionable.

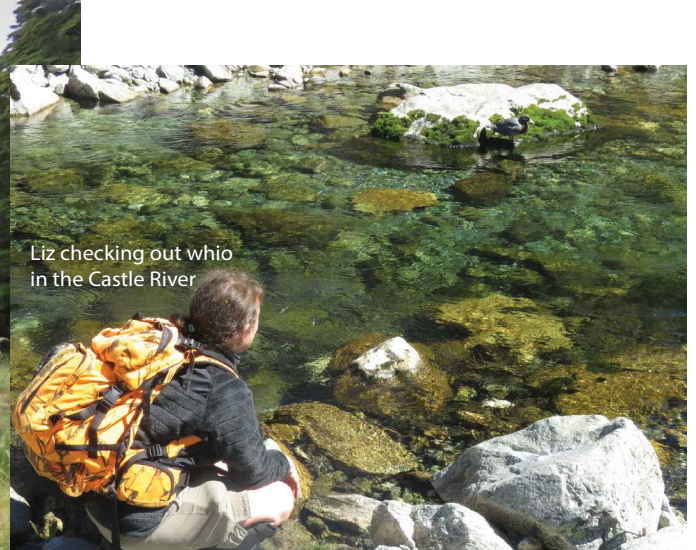
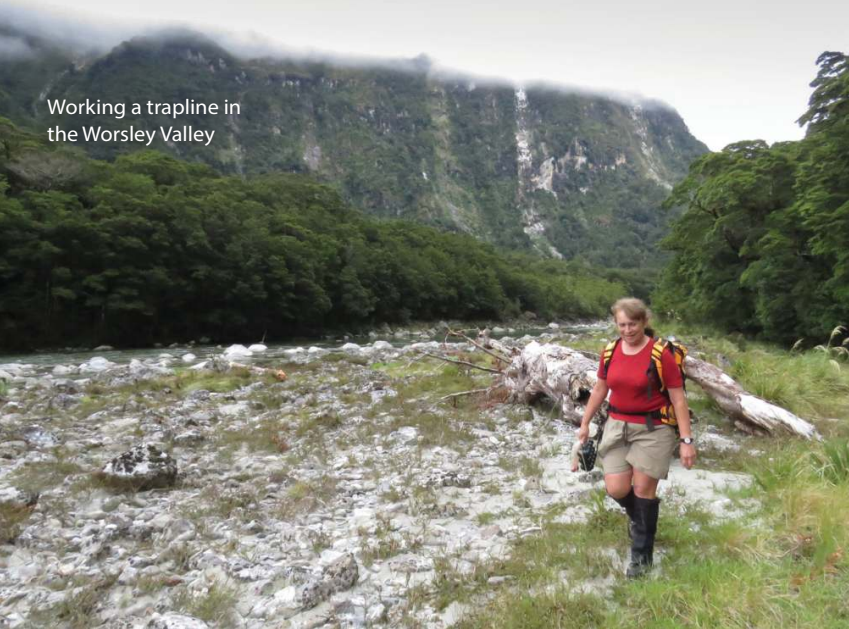
WHERE DID YOUR PREVIOUS PERCEPTION OF HUNTERS COME FROM? AND HOW HAS IT CHANGED THROUGH YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE FOUNDATION?

I had a negative impression of hunters after an experience I had with a group up the Irene River. We came across a whole pile of black plastic, tins and beer bottles from hunters who had been flown in and left all their rubbish behind. I thought that all hunters are like that.

Of course, the ones that are nice and tidy leave no signs, and you wouldn't know that they have been there. You only see the mess of the untidy ones.

I was never against hunting per se, the only anti-feeling was the fact that we would sometimes see the messes hunters had left

Working a trapline in the Worsley Valley



Liz checking out who in the Castle River

behind. Mind you, I'm sure you get trampers who do that too, but usually true backcountry trampers aren't like that.

When I moved to Te Anau I met some hunters in the community, and through the Foundation, I've met some really nice, hard-working people. This certainly removed any negative assumptions I had about hunters.

HOW DOES THE FOUNDATION'S APPROACH TO MANAGING THE WAPITI POPULATION THROUGH CONTROLLED HUNTING ALIGN WITH CONSERVATION GOALS, IN YOUR OPINION?

You can't really get rid of all the deer. Practically that is just not going to happen. So we need to control their numbers. The Foundation is culling a certain number of females (which is the best way of stopping the population increasing) and Red deer genetics, which ultimately leads to better Wapiti trophy heads. This entices the hunters into continuing to come (all those folks paying to go in the ballot), and then that the funds go into conservation efforts and help fund the other work done by the FWF, such as the culling and hut maintenance.

If you're going to have some deer you might as well have fantastic deer that people want to hunt. It seems to make sense to me.

There are also aspects of browsing monitoring, identifying areas where there is excessive browsing. This information helps the Foundation determine the number of animals that need to be removed.

Over the 20+ years of the Foundation's activities there's been twice as many deer controlled per square kilometre from the Wapiti area, compared with the rest of Fiordland that relies on the

WARO operators shooting deer for wild venison. The issue is that it fluctuates depending on the market for wild venison. In just the last five years, the FWF has increased their efforts and killed three times as many. That's why it doesn't make much sense for F&B to take the FWF to court. If the FWF had to stop doing what they're doing, then DOC can't afford to do it, and nobody else is going to do it.

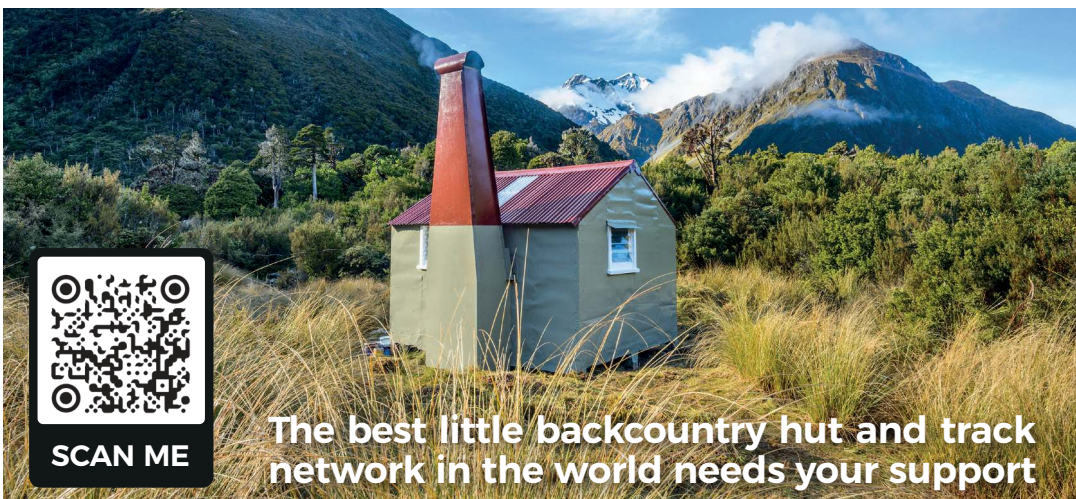
WHAT TYPES OF POSITIVE IMPACTS HAVE YOU WITNESSED AS A RESULT OF THE FOUNDATION'S EFFORTS?

The Nitz Valley, in the summer before last, carried about 35 who (including juveniles) in about four and half kilometres of water, which is amazing. And just last weekend (last trap run of eight for the season)] one of the guys saw eight who in the Castle Valley.

When we were being interviewed for the Beyond the Odds documentary we were camped in the lower clearing in the Nitz, and during the night heard kiwi duetting – two pairs of kiwi (one pair on each side of the river) – calling to each other. This was an amazing experience that led to installing additional traps on the other side of the river to really protect the area.

Another thing I've had people say to me is, "well these hunters are just doing the trapping to fulfil the agreement with DOC" – but these guys actually really enjoy getting out there. They love seeing the who, and taking photos of the scenery, mountains, vegetation, and river. And even though the trapping is designed to protect who it benefits other birds as well, such as kea.

I really like that the FWF is working towards caretaking all aspects. It's not just about the Wapiti, it's who, other native birds, vegetation, and hut maintenance. It's a great model because DOC can't do everything.



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Liz enjoys getting to know the whio that live in Fiordland

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CONNECTION TO THE WAPITI AREA OF FIORDLAND?

Those valleys are really special. Some areas you like more than others, some are a bit of a grovel, but they've all got their own special character. I love that you get to know the whio that live there too. For example, on a certain trapline, I might know there's a pair that have been living near trap number eight, so you look out for them when you go. In some seasons, they might have had ducklings, and another time you don't see them and you wonder what's happened to them. Sometimes they've moved away, or you might see them again the following year.

YOU'VE BEEN A MEMBER OF FOREST & BIRD FOR NEARLY FOUR DECADES, AND YOU'VE BEEN VOLUNTEERING WITH THE FWF FOR ALMOST TEN YEARS, BECOMING INCREASINGLY INVOLVED TO NOW BEING THE TRAPPING CO-ORDINATOR. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE LEGAL ACTION F&B HAVE BEEN TAKING AGAINST THE FWF?

I agree with a lot of the things that F&B are fighting for – but NOT this and I've written to F&B to express my feelings about it. Even before I got involved with the FWF I've never been one of those people who think all deer should be eradicated.

Whether that's to do with having come from Britain where the national parks are hugely modified, and include heaps of introduced species. (Of the six species of wild deer in England, only two of those are native, the Red and Roe deer.) But if

there's too many deer, that's a problem. You see pictures of the bush understorey from the 1950s and 60s when deer had completely eaten it down. I've never been particularly anti deer as long as they're under control.

I also see that we all need to protect this beautiful wild country. There's a huge group of the community who are hunters or hunting families and if there was a hardline stance on deer eradication they would simply get turned off conservation. Having hunters involved in the conversation, from what I've seen, actually gets them more interested in other conservation efforts.

I think it's worth tolerating that the Wapiti are eating a certain amount of vegetation for the huge benefit of having this whole group of people on side with conservation. To me, it's a no-brainer.

As I drove home from Liz's later that afternoon, with the heater on hot max to combat the bitter southerly wind, I reflected on our conversation and how powerful the saying "want better answers, ask better questions" really is. I felt grateful to Liz for sharing such candid insights into her experiences navigating the often polarised worlds of conservation and hunting.

While Liz may be just one of thousands actively involved in conservation efforts across New Zealand, her story is uniquely powerful precisely because of her dual allegiances. Her membership in both Forest & Bird and the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation reveals a common ground of shared values in the bigger picture, and an understanding that sustainable environmental stewardship cannot be achieved through uncompromising ideological stances alone.



Owner - Allan Foot

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Better Hunting Aotearoa

Maximising our hunting opportunities

Better Hunting is a free online training platform built by the Game Animal Council to help hunters upskill and hunt safely and successfully

The programme is also intended to provide a pathway and support hunters going on to do practical training, such as through NZDA's HUNTS courses.

The platform has tonnes of content all designed by New Zealand hunters for New Zealand hunters. You can do it on your phone and even download the courses for offline viewing using the app.

For new, inexperienced and casual hunters, the two main courses, Hunting Essentials and Firearm Essentials, cover basic hunting and outdoor skills. More experienced hunters will still find useful information throughout many of the modules, in the maps, forecasts, hunting and ballot calendars, intentions form or games. Each module has a short quiz and there are assessments you can do to ensure your knowledge is up to date.

Visit our website to check it out. If you enjoy using it, please share it around.

BETTERHUNTING.NZ

How do you hunt? It's a broad question and one so obvious that many new and inexperienced hunters may be afraid to ask it

It is also so fundamental that many experienced hunters don't know how to answer it fully as it's not a 'one cup of coffee' conversation

So, let's start by pulling a 'hunt' back to the basics of finding and having a reasonable chance at taking an animal. Better Hunting focuses on four key parts to this process.

1. FIND A VIABLE PLACE TO HUNT

To hunt, you need a practical (and legal!) place to do it, where there is a decent chance of finding an animal.

Key things when assessing a hunting area

are whether you've got permission to hunt there, what the hunting will be like, and can you access it.

It is recommended you start with finding a location where you have permission to hunt and that you can get to! There is no point spending hours scouring Topomap finding the ultimate river flats, clearings and likely looking areas where animals may be and then realising access is denied.

Two great ways to find hunting areas and how to get to them are by using the DOC hunting and Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa Outdoor Access Commission outdoor access maps.

DOC Hunting Map

The DOC hunting map has all the recreational hunting areas available on Public Conservation Land. The map shows the boundaries of these areas, but also which areas you need an open or restricted permit for. The map also provides useful information on some areas such as what species are present, landholders to request access permission from and rules around dogs.

Outdoor Access Commission Outdoor Access Maps

While many other maps show publicly accessible areas, the Outdoor Access Commission maps are feature-rich and offer all kinds of information. The key feature for hunters is the ability to view public roads

and access routes, even unformed ones. The purple lines show you the location of public roads and routes that are otherwise indistinguishable from private land or creeks. This can help you find lesser-accessed areas and avoid inadvertently trespassing on private land.

Better Hunting Multi-Map Tool

The Game Animal Council has recently created a multi-map tool on Better Hunting that makes it easy to cross-check information on both these maps (and many others). You can simply go to the 'Maps' tab in the menu bar, click on the location you are interested in on the topographic map and this will create links to that location across the DOC Hunting map, multiple Outdoor Access Commission maps, weather forecasting sites, Google Earth and more. It also links to the DOC pesticide summary map, so you can make sure your new hunting area isn't currently unsafe to harvest from.

2. ANTICIPATE ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR

Now that you are looking at somewhere you are allowed to hunt on and can get to, you need to think about what animals may be around and what they are likely to be doing at the time/s you'll be there to hunt.

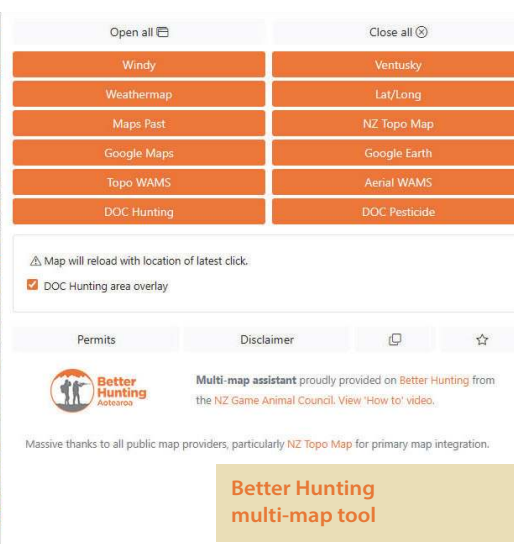
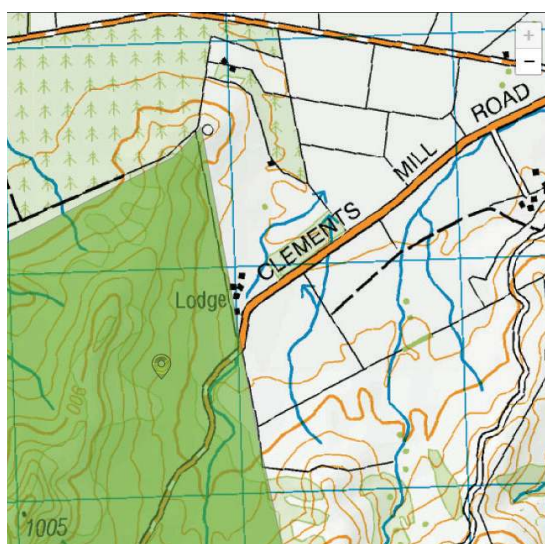
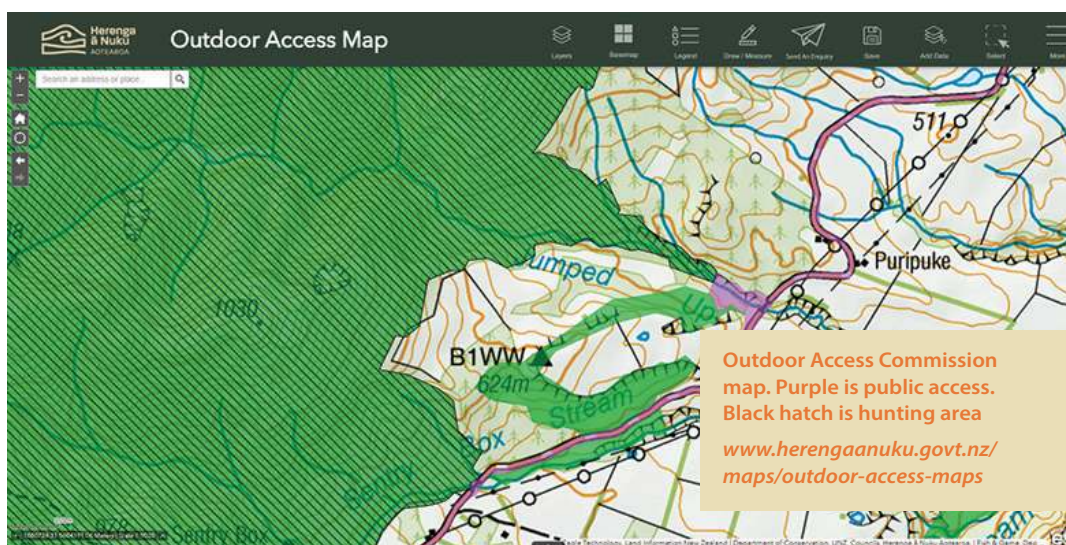
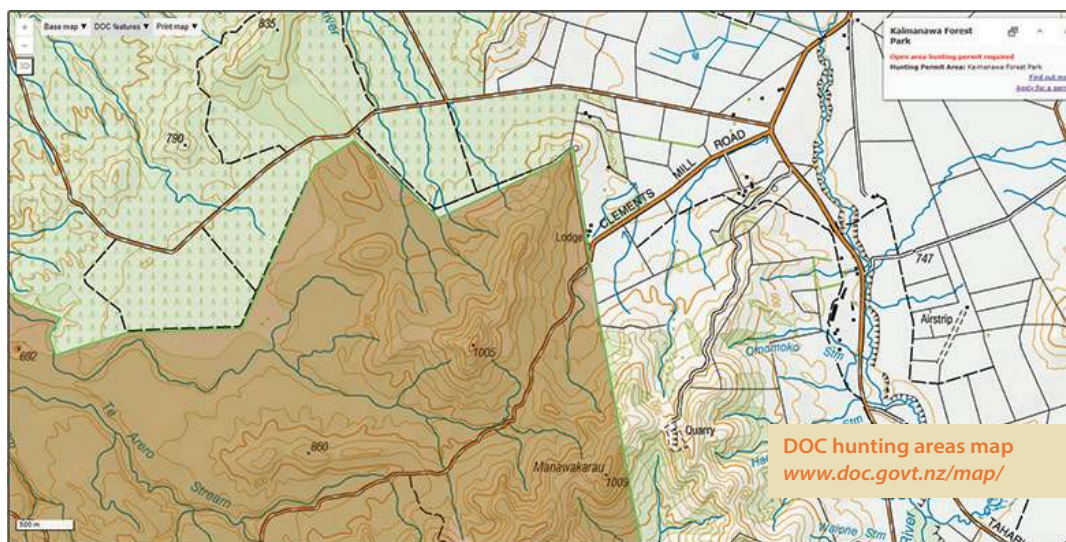
An entire library of books is written on this subject, but as a most basic example, if it's winter and the tops are snowy, it is likely the animals will drop down below the snowline. As it's cold they are likely to enjoy north faces that get some sun and perhaps easterly facing slopes in the morning.

All game species are different, but as a rule, if you think about the situation and what you'd do if you were a game animal to keep comfortable, fed and hydrated, you probably won't be too far off in your guesstimations.

3. CONSIDER POSSIBLE HUNTING APPROACHES

Once you've decided on a hunting location and broadly estimated what animals might be there and what they'll be doing, it's time to think about how you might approach the hunt.

The wind direction should always dictate your plan because the number one rule of hunting is to always hunt into the wind.



However, thinking ahead can make the task on the ground a bit easier.

If you're bush hunting, you might hunt river flats, watch clearings on slopes (faces), sidle, or cut up and down. Early and late in the day, watching river flats, clearings and slopes may be met with success, whereas during the middle of the day you might need to get sidling or bush stalking.

Spot Sign And Be Able To Stalk Effectively

There is no point quietly and diligently bush stalking an area with no animals around. You'd be better off boosting it to somewhere else to increase your chances. So how do you prevent this situation? The best way is to educate ourselves in spotting and assessing game sign.

Key animal sign includes poo, plant



nibbling, trails and hoof prints. Through experience and understanding you will, over time, learn to recognise and read sign better. The Better Hunting platform gives you a head start by providing an animal sign gallery including sign from different game animal species.

The Game Animal Council is always looking for more contributions to this resource, so please if you have photos sitting on your phone that may help other aspiring hunters understand what they're looking for, consider sending them through.

4. SITUATIONAL AWARENESS AND REFLECTIVE THINKING

The most successful hunters are flexible and adaptable. Those 'must reach the top of the mountain' type people are not always the most effective hunters.

To become a more successful hunter, you should practice good situational awareness and, once you're done with your hunts, do some reflective thinking to help you improve.

Situational Awareness

Situational awareness is all about noticing things, understanding what they mean, and responding accordingly. We do this in our lives all the time and it is particularly important in the outdoors, e.g. noticing if it's raining hard enough to make clothes wet, knowing that wearing wet clothes can be dangerous and so putting a jacket on.

Less obvious indicators that require more intentional thinking can make a big difference to success in our hunting, e.g., being able to read what the clouds are doing can tell you a lot about the wind and its direction. In hunting this can also mean doing things that conserve your energy or finding routes through the bush that make your travel easier.

If you have 'a plan' and then see obvious fresh sign, a clever hunter may change their plan. Being situationally aware can also help you make more decisive decisions, such as when to plan for having an 'emergency night out'. This can help ensure you have all the right survival gear and make yourself as comfortable as possible while there's still light to set up a makeshift camp etc.

[Animal sign gallery on Better hunting](#)

Reflective thinking

Reflective thinking is not just corporate office jargon, it's a skill that can be applied everywhere and involves intentionally learning from your experiences.

After a hunt, you should take the time on your way home or over the next few days to think about it. What went right? What went wrong? What cues did you miss? What gear, skills, practice do you need to do better? How could you have hunted that situation better next time?

A little bit of reflective thinking like this can help you continuously improve your hunting approach, acquire the right gear for your type of hunting and, in the end, be more successful.

The 'Accessing Hunting Areas', 'How to Hunt' and 'Situational Awareness' modules in the Hunting Essentials course of Better Hunting cover all this stuff in much more detail. Just go to betterhunting.nz, sign up for free and get learning!



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A HUNT TO REMEMBER

WRITTEN BY ~ JANE COCHRANE

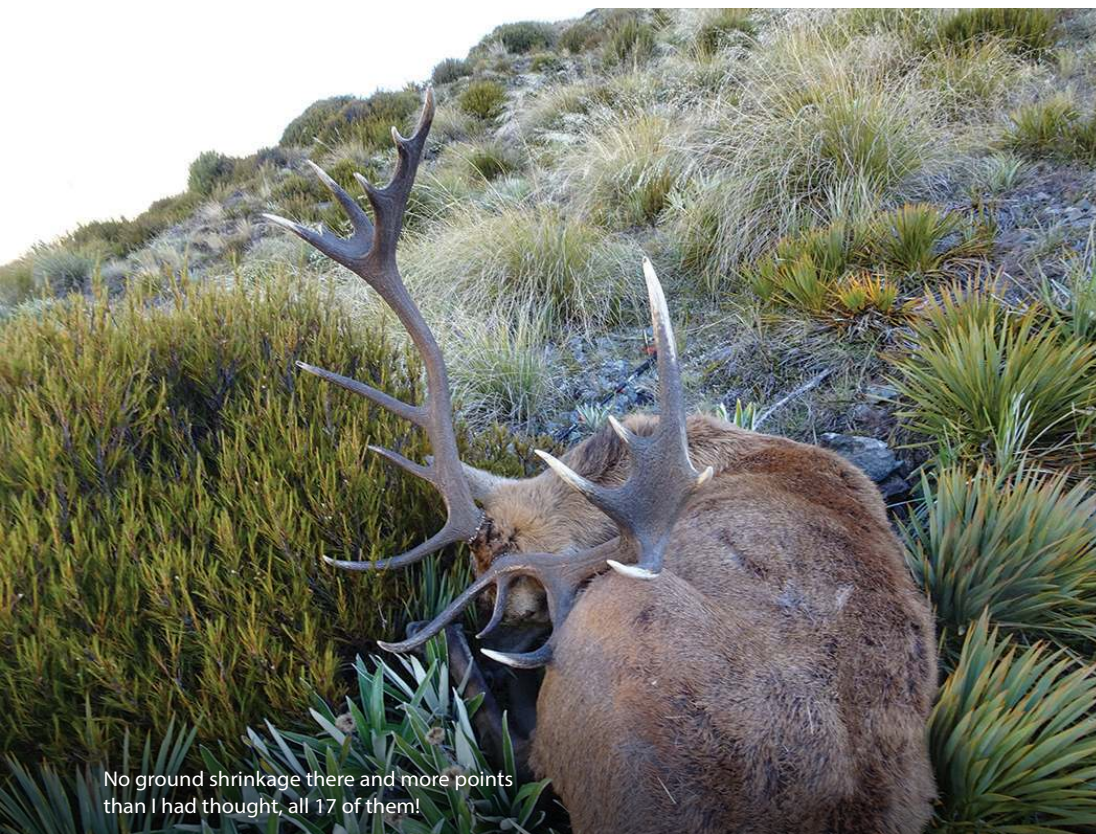
NOT EVERYONE GETS TO SHOOT A MATURE STAG THAT THEY FEEL IS WHAT THEY'VE SPENT MANY YEARS TRYING TO ACHIEVE, BUT I FEEL I HAVE FINALLY GOT THERE. IT MIGHT NOT BE THE 40X40 INCH 12-POINT TYPICAL SCOTTISH HEAD THAT I ALWAYS DREAMED OF FINDING, BUT IT IS CERTAINLY MY BEST HEAD YET, AND I'M RAPT TO HAVE SECURED IT WITH AN AWESOME STALK WHICH MAKES THE TROPHY ALL THE MORE SPECIAL.

I'd had no success over the roar despite once again coming close to a stag in a steep bit of thick bush country that I've been after for three years now, and passing up on several other stags that needed more years to mature.

So, a month after the roar, my daughter, her partner and I headed away early one morning for an area I thought may hold deer feeding up large before winter.

I was left to go my own way up a gully I had been up before. After a bit of a climb up through the bush, I broke out to the scree and tussock area above the bushline. There were a few hinds and young stags higher up in the distance, but nothing worth chasing. I carried on slowly climbing and sidling but didn't spot anything else. Now in

very open country with nothing but the folds of the land and the odd bit of low scrub to hide me, I decided to sit and have a glass around and some lunch. I then spotted a reasonably good stag feeding up in a wee patch of scrub with a couple of hinds bedded near him. Then another set of antlers behind a bush - both stags good enough, but the one I could see looked young. While I watched, the second stag stood up and fed away up the valley with two hinds. He, too, looked to be young and not as well-developed as the closer stag. I carried on glassing hoping something more mature might show up. After about half an hour another set of antlers appeared in some scrub and eventually the owner. This stag looked bigger all round but was hard to assess as he was a wee way up the valley feeding, but only for a short time before he sat down again. I could



No ground shrinkage there and more points than I had thought, all 17 of them!

just see him and thought I could make out 14-15 points. Patience was called for, so while I finished lunch, I assessed my stalking options, remembering I had little to no cover and was also in full view of the first stag, a hind and a fawn. **The stag up the valley was a bit over 700 yards away and the only place I thought I might be able to stalk to was still 400 yards from him.** I'm not confident with long shots, so was thinking I might have to pass on this opportunity or risk it and try to close the gap and hope he would move in my direction.

My mind was made up when he stood up and started feeding in my direction, so the stalk was all on - fingers crossed I didn't blow it! It took me around two hours to cross a small distance in full view as I hugged low to the ground, moving at a snail's pace. I had to change route as the scree I needed to cross was too wide, so found a narrower bit with a few wee patches of flat vegetation on it. Finally, after a nerve-wracking two hours, I reached a fold out of sight, and was able to head to my intended shooting spot. Almost there, and I realised I'd be in full view again so crawled the last 30 yards, pulling my daypack and rifle along with me. I made it to the wee lip of hill and slid my daypack up onto a tussock hump there to make a rifle rest. **The stag was now opposite me but had climbed a bit and was busy feeding.** He looked big and heavy in the body as a mature stag should. I ranged him again at 338 yards. I've never shot that far and have never been confident in long shots, but

if I wanted this stag there was no option but to back myself, and with no time to waste as the stag was grazing upwards.

The first stag was still closer and had a good head but needed another year or two to mature. After checking the range again, I carefully set myself up for the shot and wound the scope up to 9 power. I closed the bolt and settled myself, then squeezed off the shot. Half expecting to see him take off and hoping I didn't just wound him, to my utter relief, he dropped like a stone, rolled a wee way down the slope to stop and never move again.

As I climbed up to where he lay, the younger stag climbed too but kept stopping to watch me - a silly move really, so maybe he had a full gut.

Getting a good look at him, I could see that he was a nice promising 13-pointer, but did need a few more years to mature and maybe one day make some other hunter very happy. He'll need to get a bit smarter if he's to reach maturity though.

I made it up the opposite face to reach the old boy and pulled his head out from under him so I could admire the magnificent antlers he had grown. No ground shrinkage there and more points than I had thought, all 17 of them! Whew - I felt absolutely amazed while kind of sad at the same time that I had taken the trophy of a lifetime.

Then it was down to the knife work. He was very skinny and must have been working hard over the roar. Unfortunately, the head skin was a bit rough so would have made the load a bit much for this old girl to carry, and time was getting on. The carry out wasn't easy, especially as I made a mistake when I got to a scrubby area and went the wrong way down so had to climb back out to avoid a gut I couldn't navigate. It was starting to get dark and I still had a way to go down through the bush. At 63 I found it pretty tough going, plus I wasn't as fit as usual after suffering a hamstring injury.

But help was on its way when I managed to contact my daughter and, with her partner, they came up through the trees to help me. I can say I was very relieved to see their headlamps as I was getting pretty knackered.

I was one very tired but happy hunter as we bumped our way back down the riverbed heading for home, and very grateful to my daughter and her partner for taking me away up into the mountains for the day.



A tired but very happy Jane with her trophy

THE 'CHEAP' CUTS

WRITTEN BY ~ REGNAR CHRISTENSEN

Being a chef I'm lucky to have an abundance of neat produce to work with on a daily basis.

With that being said, its fairly easy these days to be able to find obscure and hard to find produce outside of the commercial kitchen.

My philosophy for food is simple; find the best organic produce I can, and cook it with the respect it deserves. Simplicity is key here, I'm not a fan of over complicated food at the best of times. Simply put, I do my best to let ingredients speak for themselves, there is a lot to be said for a tomato straight from the garden drizzled with a little quality olive oil, some black pepper and a little basil.

When I was 20, I was lucky enough to spend some time working in the world-famous restaurant, St JOHN in London, famed for its nose to tail eating ethos and wonderful simplicity. My first day here involved helping a senior chef break down a whole aged cattlebeast on a giant wooden butcher's block, followed by me sawing open the head, removing the brain and preparing it for use in terrine. It was also game season during this time, wooden crates would arrive full of grouse which I would prepare by removing the liver and heart which would be used for sauce and pate. This was my opportunity to learn and appreciate the often ignored and delicious parts of an animal so often underutilized.

More often than not, the lesser known and used cuts are the most delicious and surprisingly easy to cook with. I'm not here to give a speech about using the whole animal, just a little nudge towards trying something different, you really might be surprised.

I regularly use venison on the menu in the restaurant and we often feature cheeks, heart, tongue or liver. I also use these cuts at home when I'm lucky enough to harvest a deer for myself.

BRAISED VENISON CHEEKS

These are absolutely delicious, and you can use them in a range of ways, this recipe is more of a how to of cooking with them and a simple method for a great result, in the photo supplied you will see a version I have plated of them, but the world is your oyster. Piled on top of buttery mashed potato, shredded with the sauce and mixed through pasta or put through a stir-fry or fried rice these will surely be a winner.

This recipe can easily be transferred to pork, goat or any other cheeks.

One thing with cooking with venison, *i can't stress this enough*, cook with low heat! There is nothing to break down on venison and the only thing you will achieve is a dry result. I've tried many a dry stew that has been braised at high heat and the result is always the same.

It takes a bit of time to build up a stockpile of cheeks but if you are willing to chip away at freezing them down, or if you are doing a bit of culling on private land its well worth the little effort it takes to remove them.

I prefer to cook over fire where possible, but this can be done in an oven at 100 degrees or in a crockpot.

This recipe will serve 4 with a healthy helping of sides.



BRAISED VENISON CHEEKS

- 8-12 cheeks (Sika, Red, Fallow, etc, it doesn't matter they are all delicious)
- 1 litre chicken stock
- 300mls beef or chicken reduction (if you can't find this buy 1 litre of beef stock and reduce down to 300mls)
- 50g sliced ginger
- 10 black peppercorns
- 2 star anise
- 200mls dry vermouth (or use white wine)

Method

Put on a pot of water and bring to the boil, add the cheeks and cook for 2 minutes and then put straight into iced water.

Add everything except the wine to a clean pan, (I'm a big fan of cast iron) and bring to the boil.

At this point cover and cook over gentle embers mostly indirect or put in the oven at 100 for 6 hours and go plan your next hunting excursion.

When the cheeks are done you should be able to gently push a knife or skewer through them. Remove them from the heat and allow the cheeks to rest in the liquid. Braised meat needs to rest just like a steak, I would suggest resting for an hour minimum or until the braise has cooled to room temperature.

To finish remove the cheeks and set aside, in a clean pan add the vermouth and reduce by half then add the strained braising liquor and reduce until it coats a spoon and add the cheeks back.

At this point they are ready to do what you want with them; at home I'd put them over some mashed spuds and serve with some green beans and a salad. They really are simple and delicious, and you can serve them however you like, just give it a crack.

SO HOW DO I GET THE DEER CHEEKS?

Good question, and I'll be honest, when I'm in the bush I'm not exactly a master butcher but here is a quick guide to what I do to remove them.

I find it's easiest to remove the head from the animal first and then work on the ground with a pillowslip or similar underneath so you can work clean.

Cut down the side of the jaw to remove the skin, working as neatly as you can to not damage the meat until you have freed off enough skin to have easy access to the cheek, you will need to have gone above the eye. You might find it easier and tidier to remove the freed skin at this point so you can work freely.

The cheek starts just below the eye and I make an incision here with the knife, then working much like a back steak run the knife against the bone with small strokes of the knife until you have essentially filleted the cheek and then make a final cut to detach from the other meat and sinew at the base of the jaw.

Repeat the same down the other side. As always allow the meat to cool and set before packing away.

It's not pretty but it gets the job done quick and effectively, and once you have done it a couple of times it's particularly easy.



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GAME ANIMAL COUNCIL NEWS

WRITTEN BY
TIM GALE | GENERAL MANAGER



Collaboration the key to conservation success

As a statutory organisation created by an Act of Parliament, the Game Animal Council has a set of 15 functions that define what we can do.

Those functions, by omission, also define what we cannot do. These limitations mean it is critically important that we work with others in order to achieve positive outcomes for hunters.

As a sector, the hunting community has come a long way over the last couple of decades in working constructively with other stakeholders. Of course, there remains those who oppose this collaborative approach, but from my perspective these hardliners are fast becoming an endangered species.

For far too long the debate over game animals in New Zealand has been characterised as those with conservation interests against those with hunting interests.

The hunters and hunting organisations I deal with on a daily basis just do not reflect this characterisation. They are as interested in conservation and looking after our native species as much as they are about ensuring New Zealand has a

hunting future.

The good news is that we can and should aim to have both.

The balance that needs to be struck and the win-win scenario the GAC is working towards is best summed up by the Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020, which states:

"Reaching a balance to ensure that valued introduced species continue to provide the benefits they are valued for, while also ensuring that indigenous biodiversity thrives, is a key challenge for Aotearoa New Zealand."

Unfortunately, there also remains a hardline element within the conservation movement that seems determined to obstruct a pragmatic 'common sense conservation' approach.

Conflict driven by an ideological desire to return New Zealand back to what it was before humans arrived has been detrimental to making progress in conservation. It restricts having mature conversations about the future of our public conservation lands and the ability for DOC and others to work with the community to achieve practical conservation outcomes.

At the end of the day nobody wants an overpopulation of game animal adversely affecting the environment. As hunters we want to hunt good quality animals in a healthy ecosystem that provides us with uplifting recreational opportunities and quality meat to take

home for our families and communities.

The Te Ara ki Mua (The Pathway Forward) Wild Animals Management Framework that has been in place for nearly two years now sets out how management can be undertaken in a way that provides us the benefits game animals are valued for while mitigating their impacts. It recognises that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to meeting this challenge and that there are a lot of complex issues at play.

Underpinning Te Ara ki Mua is an understanding that success requires partnerships and collaboration at a community level. No matter what future budget DOC has to play with, it will never be able to effectively manage deer, pigs, tahr and chamois alone. Add goats to that job sheet and it really is an impossible task.

Part of the solution is therefore empowering hunter and community-funded organisations like the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, Central North Island Sika Foundation or NZ Tahr Foundation to undertake their own management programmes in partnership with DOC and at a far-reduced cost to the Crown.

The Game Animal Council Act provides a solid legislative avenue to do this through the 'Herds of Special Interest' (HOSI) mechanism. Up until recently, the political climate and resource constraints on the GAC have meant the process to set up HOSI has not

progressed as much as we would like.

HOSI are intended to recognise and manage highly valued game animal herds in specific locations on public conservation land. Critics accuse the HOSI concept of allowing for some form of 'game farm' on the public estate because management is likely to include targeting certain animals to improve the quality of the hunting.

The reality of a HOSI, like the Community Agreement governing the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation's work, is that it will result in more active and intensive management of the herd by hunters and the hunting sector. Increased animal quality and better conservation outcomes go hand-in-hand because both are achieved through the proactive management of animal densities.

In short, a HOSI could be described as the active management of a herd of game animals in a specific location to achieve objectives related to the primary values of that herd and the enhancement of conservation outcomes.

The Game Animal Council Act also sets out a number of overriding considerations that must be considered when the Minister for Hunting and

Fishing designates a HOSI. These include the welfare and management of public conservation land and resources generally as well as statements of general policy.

As is the case in Fiordland, a HOSI can also provide conservation and recreational benefits from volunteer hunter-led initiatives such as predator trapping and track and hut maintenance.

A DOC/GAC collaborative programme to establish the process for setting up a HOSI is now working through the formal stages of the application to designation process. It is critical that we ensure the development and implementation of herd management plans can satisfactorily exist within the maze of overlapping conservation legislation. Unfortunately, this is not a simple exercise!

It has taken some time to get momentum to progress HOSI. But now we have



the wind at our back, I really hope the hunting community gets in behind the concept. If that happens, we can look forward to a number of HOSI successfully managed through partnerships between DOC, the GAC and local hunting organisations.

The NZ Game Animal Council is a statutory organisation working to improve the management of game animals and hunting for recreation, communities, commerce and conservation.

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WILLBERG RIVER

WRITTEN BY
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TAHR BALLOT BLOCKS

Looking across the
Willberg River to
Willberg Range
Photos - Shane Hall

Draining the North Poerua Glacier is the tight and steep sided Willberg Valley. Like many of these Westland valleys the Willberg is named after one of the early surveyors from around the 1880's. This is not a place you'll catch much sun, and especially so in those later ballot periods

This makes for a lot of ice on the rocks in the riverbed. The benefit to those steep valley sides is you're fairly well protected from the wind, with the downside being that any decent rain will have the river coming up and down like a yoyo, and the lower landing site being flood prone in heavy rain.

It's one of the more limited campsites in the ballot blocks, so don't expect a few acres to work with. Downstream the lower landing site is at about 1000m above sea level on a rocky piece of riverbed. Here there is more scrub to hunt, and the numerous small side creeks can be followed to access the upper scrub line.

The upper landing site is on a good sized tussock clearing at about 1250

meters above sea level, which has plenty of room and easy access to the river for water. Being almost in the very head of the valley there is good access to the tops from the upper site, but with modern heli pressure the majority of hunting is downstream from camp.

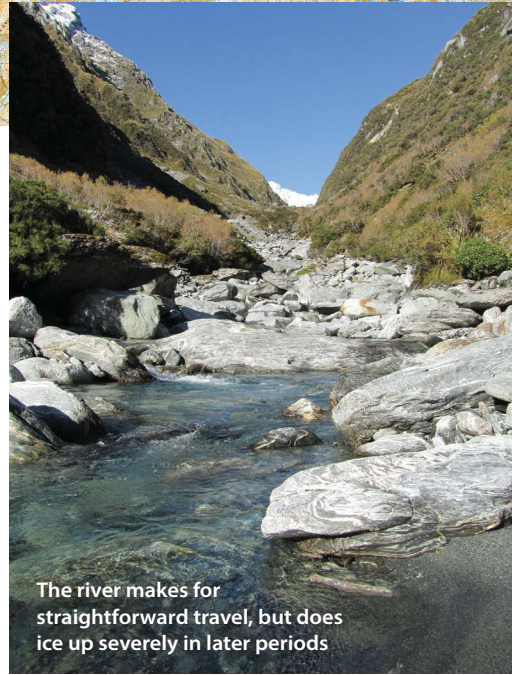
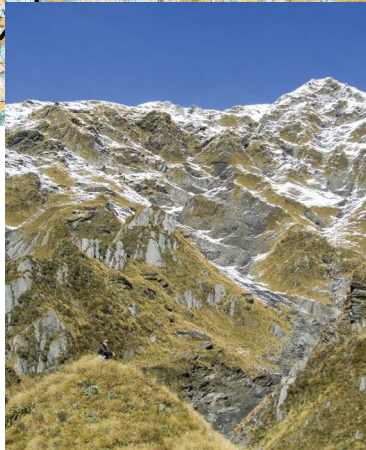
Given the elevation there's every chance of snow falling right to the valley floor, especially in the



The lower Willberg Valley, with camp at the bottom left of frame



Lower camp



The river makes for straightforward travel, but does ice up severely in later periods

later periods. So be prepared and carry the tools needed to get around once any snowpack firms up. And at the time of writing this it looks like we are soon to get our first significant snowfall for the winter. The Wilberg has seen some fairly

consistent DOC control over the last few years, so it will be interesting to hear what the numbers are now like, but with that lower scrub country to hide in, and with heli hunting teaching the tahr to be very helicopter averse, they certainly won't have got them all.



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MID TRENT HUT

WRITTEN BY ~ ANDREW BUGLASS | REMOTEHUTS.CO.NZ

Mid Trent Hut is a Department of Conservation maintained hut that can be found midway up the Trent valley in Central Westland

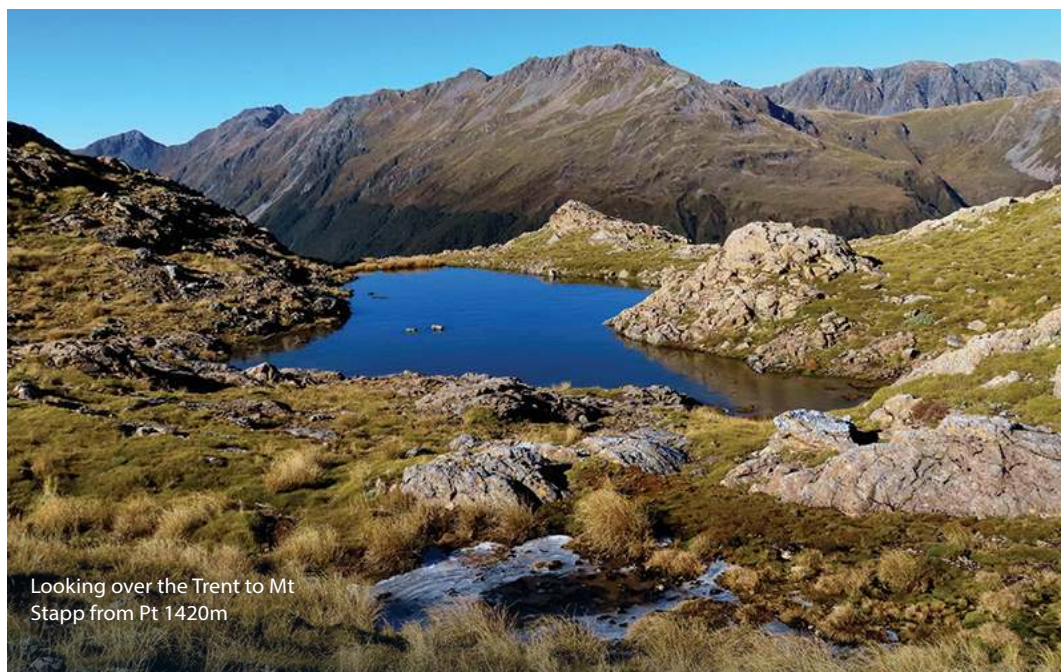
The Trent is one of the bigger tributaries of the Ahaura River and most of the valley is uncharacteristically gentle and wide for Westland with large grassy flats and open forest glades along the fringes. There is one major gorge upstream of Mid Trent, after which the valley opens out again.

Top Trent Hut is located in the upper valley and Trent Saddle at its head provides a relatively easy crossing into the Haupiri catchment. The Trent/ Haupiri circuit would be the most common of the trips described in Mid Trent's hutbook. Having said this, the hut is a fairly low use one, with a mix of hunters, trampers, fisherfolk, and the odd horse trekker as visitors. The main reason for the low numbers is probably the hut's distance from the road end at Waikiti Downs in the Ahaura Valley. **It's all river travel and although relatively easy walking, it's a good 18kms with numerous river crossings required.** Fine weather and low or normal river levels are necessary for the trip to be enjoyable and safe.

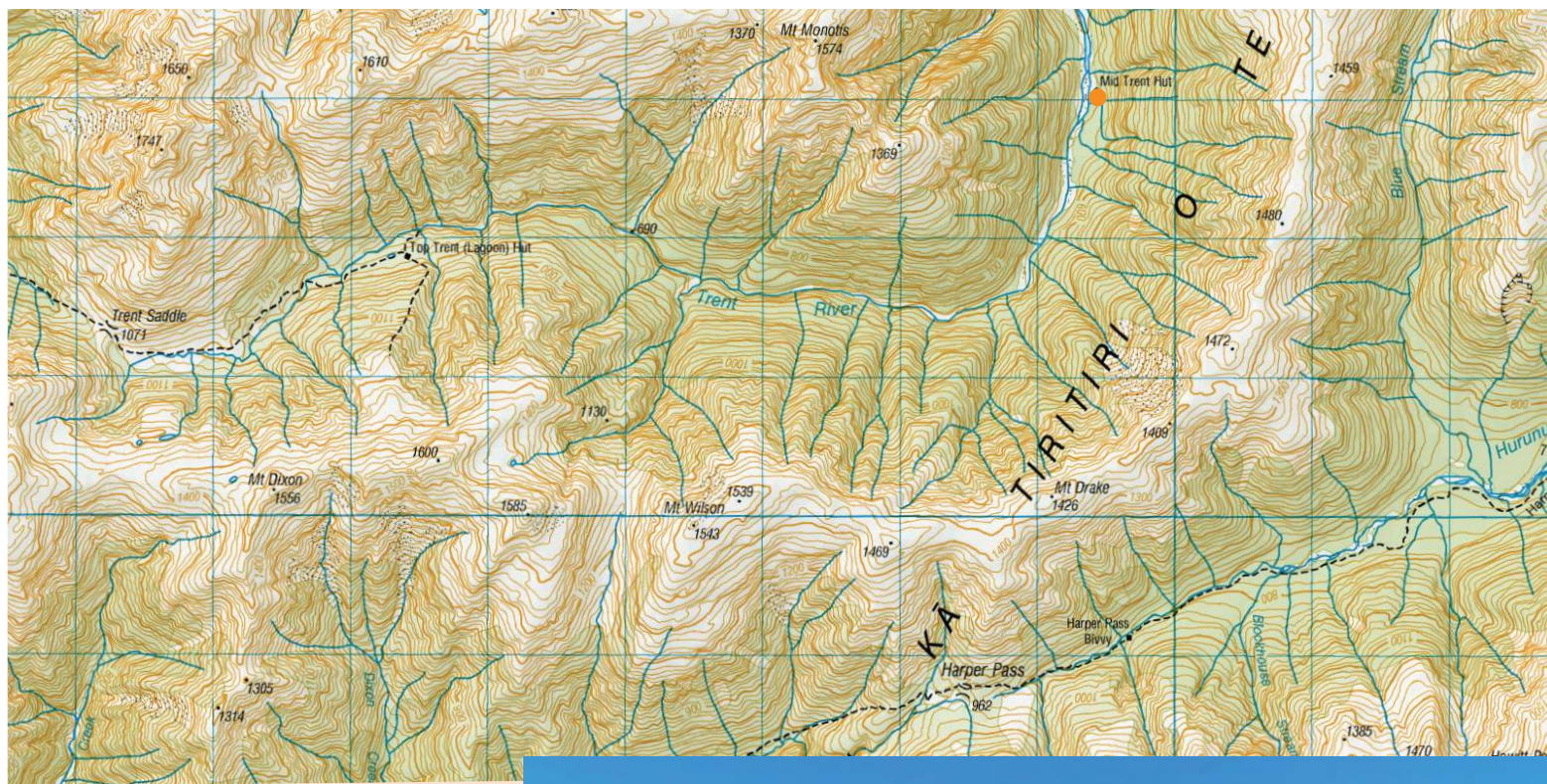
The forest in the Trent is a mix of red and silver beech, with the latter dominant at higher altitudes. The

density of the bush varies from a nice and open to veritable thickets of dense pole beech and hardwoods. There are

extensive areas of open tops in the catchment, which when accessed, are generally easy travel with numerous tarns and camping spots aplenty. **The forest often transitions directly to open tussock without the problematic alpine scrub bands common further down the Coast.** The side-creeks are sometimes negotiable all the way to the tops, but are equally likely to be impassable with bluffs and waterfalls. Chamois are present on the open tops in singles or small groups. Recreational hunters often fly in to Mid Trent for the roa but, this year at least, don't seem to have made much of a dent in the deer population.



Looking over the Trent to Mt Stapp from Pt 1420m

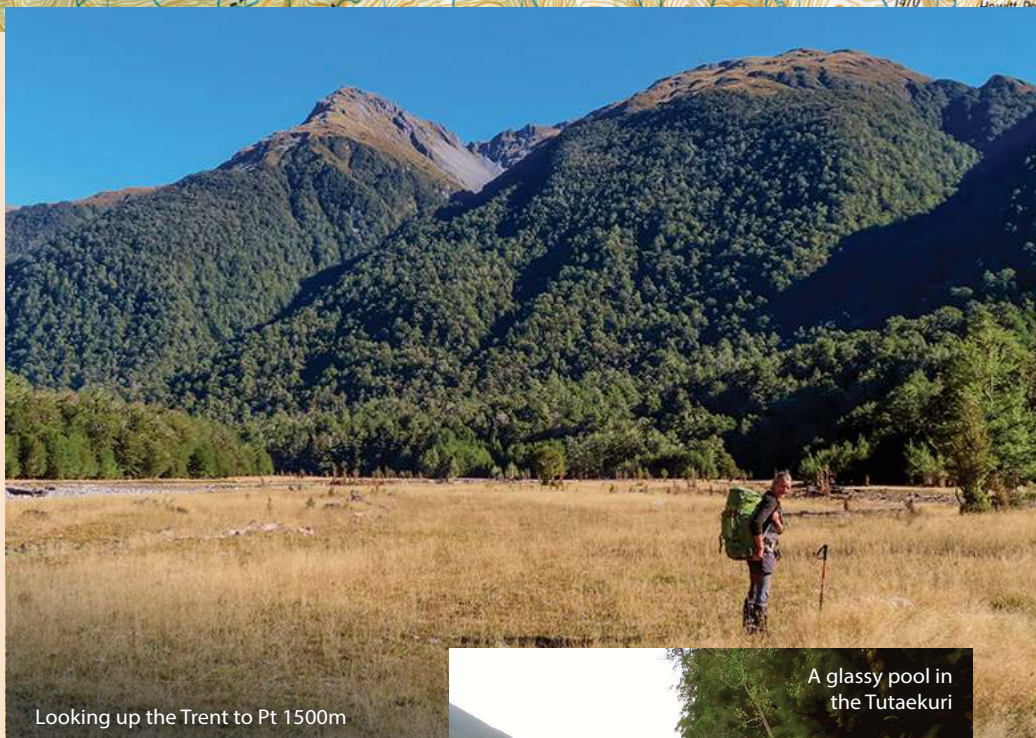


Plentiful food on the grassy flats and along the bush edges and an abundance of fresh sign seems to indicate this.

The Mid Trent Hut is located at 520m altitude in a small clearing tucked in against the forest next to the river. It's a pleasant spot with a good wood supply. The hut is a New Zealand Forest Service S81 four-bunk design built in the 1960s to replace a culler's tent camp located there. **It originally had an open fire but this was removed at some point. The Department of Conservation gave Mid Trent a major overhaul, essentially a rebuild, in 2011.** The hut was re-piled, lined and insulated, and had a woodburner installed. It gets very cosy very quickly with the burner cranked up. The birdlife in the area comprises of kaka, kea, whio, miro miro, and the ever-present bush robin. Kiwi can also be heard at times in a few spots.

A crossing of the Main Divide to Harper Pass is possible from Mid Trent via Mt Drake and down an old track leading from the tops to the Pass. There are also a number of possible crossings of the range on the TL of the Trent over to the Waikiti valley and the six-bunk hut located there. **The most direct of these is up the spur on the true left of Graf Creek and down a steep scree on the Waikiti side.**

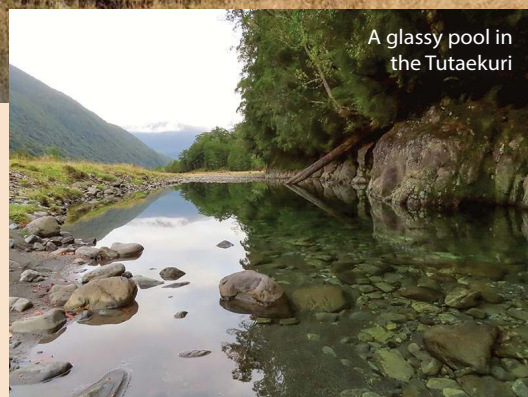
Travel to the four-bunk Top Trent Hut located in the headwaters of the valley is untracked and passes through the Trent Gorge. It is a fine-weather-only route,



Looking up the Trent to Pt 1500m

said to be enjoyable (on a good day maybe), but involves at least fifty crossings and regular wading through numerous tight little sections. One comment in the Mid Trent hutbook mentioned having to do "nipple deep" crossings.

The tributaries of the Ahaura are not as well known or as spectacular as other parts of the Southern Alps but they have their own grace, charm and ambience. The relative ease of access, a mix of terrain and experiences, and huts that you can regularly have to yourself, provide a little something for everybody. We are incredibly



A glassy pool in the Tutaekuri

fortunate to live in a land with abundant wild spaces and facilities like this that are maintained by government agencies, or community groups. Let's keep it that way. More information on the Trent Valley can be found at:

<https://www.remotehuts.co.nz/mid-trent-hut.html>



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**OUT THERE
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KIWI ULTRALIGHT 3X3M TARP AND BUG BIVVY

WRITTEN BY ~ LUKE CARE

The humble fly, or tarp, has been around since the first shelters. Would a woolly mammoth skin qualify? Probably

Given there's been a few thousand years of development, it's a pretty difficult recipe to improve on. The concept is simple – a sheet of fabric to stretch over yourself and shelter from the elements. So where to from there? There's the basics, like tie-out points – fairly easy to get right. There's the extras, like the guy ropes – again, not that hard. But you can't talk about tarps without addressing the fabric

With tents so light these days the simple tarp has to work even harder to maintain it's weight advantage. Tarps are mostly commonly made from nylon, or silicone coated nylon (SilNylon) to be more accurate, but fortunately the fabrics industry is always developing something new, and this time a product from Challenge Sailcloth has come served on a golden platter for hunters and hikers. Kiwi Ultralight were quick to realise its potential, and have brought a tarp to market made out of the ground-breaking new fabric, and from what I can see they're the only ones doing it.

ULTRA TNT

No it's not an explosive. Lighter than nylon, heavier (but tougher) than DCF/Cuben Fibre, UltraTNT is part of the ULTRA collection at Challenge Sailcloth, and they've really pushed

to create a material that's not just lightweight but tough too.

UltraTNT is 15 times stronger than steel by weight. It has huge tear strength, around 30-40kg, and an abrasion resistance of 3,600 cycles, it's designed to handle pretty much anything the great outdoors throws at it. Imagine both Ultra TNT and DCF as grids of super tough strings, with a softer fabric in between. Your typical nylon is a more uniform fabric. The fibres of the weave mean any punctures shouldn't tear and compromise the whole fly as it would with nylon, and you can easily fix them with patch tape.

It is thoroughly waterproof, rated to an astronomical 140,000mm. It absorbs zero water, so simply shake any rain beading off the outside and package it away knowing you're not carrying any extra weight. I will say though, do air it out

when you get home, as any moisture trapped inside won't find its own way out!

So, we know it's awesome, but how does it stack up to the competition?

Cuben Fibre (now called Dyneema Composite Fibre/DCF) had dominated this space until now. Both materials are known for their incredible strength-to-weight ratios. DCF is a similar structure, consisting of a grid of Dyneema fibres laminated between layers of polyester, offering superb tensile strength. This makes DCF a top choice for applications requiring ultra-lightweight yet strong materials. However the biggest performance advantage of UltraTNT is that the fabric has a diagonal weave as well, meaning it's stabilized in three directions instead of DCF's two. This means that while UltraTNT has bigger gaps between the grids, it is more dimensionally stable than DCF, which really reduces the deformation of the fabric under load. This deformation isn't like nylon stretch that springs back, once DCF is deformed it stays that way. This superior stability increases durability along with making the fabric extremely rigid when pitched well. Ultra TNT is also available in more opaque colours than DCF, meaning more privacy inside and better shelter from the sun.

DCF's proven track record in ultralight backpacking gear makes it particularly suitable for those absolutely prioritizing

weight savings, though it comes at a much higher cost than any alternative and with some maintenance considerations. At roughly half the price of DCF, Ultra TNT is not only better performing in many ways but also leads to much more affordable shelters.

UltraTNT isn't a lot lighter than the lightest SilNylons, about 0.94oz per square yard vs 1oz per square yard, but that's comparing it to the very lightest of fabrics. A nylon that light would be incredibly delicate, and ignores the fact that nylon absorbs water and will get heavier through a trip. **Comparing a more common nylon tarp weight you'd expect 30-40% weight savings.**

Interestingly, both the puncture resistance and abrasion resistance of Ultra TNT are lowest when it is brand new. It noted it when I pushed my pack down under my feet one night and the frame caught the stiff fabric, it deformed the gaps of polyester but was caught by the strong fibres before it could puncture the fabric. Ripstop design in action.

As the material softens abrasion and puncture resistance go up, essentially it has more give after a bit of use. You'll notice this too as the fabric is quite crinkly and noisy to begin with, but softens with use. The tarp is a little more bulky when packed compared to a nylon fly, and you must loosely roll it, not stuff it, so that you don't form hard creases in the material. It pushed down into a bag a bit smaller than a 2l bottle of milk.

Yes the Ultra TNT tarp is more expensive than nylon counterparts, and yes it requires a little more management, but you don't get something for nothing in this world. This fabric nearly halves the weight, is for all intents and purposes completely waterproof, doesn't stretch or sag and is outrageously strong. It's cheaper and more durable than DCF and has better abrasion resistance. It provides a much more palatable price point for people like me who are looking to save some weight in their sleep systems and sits pretty much right in the middle between nylon and DCF.

The result of this is that Kiwi Ultralight are offering a 3x3m fly that weighs only 350gm, 420gm including the guy ropes and bag. With sleeping mat (380gm), quilt (670gm), fly and guy ropes (420gm) but no ground sheet (watch out for speargrass) my whole sleep system weighs a staggering total of 1.46kg. I've got sleeping bags heavier than that.

BUG BIVVY

The partner addition to the tarp is



The humble fly, or tarp, can be pitched in a whole manner of ways to make life a little easier

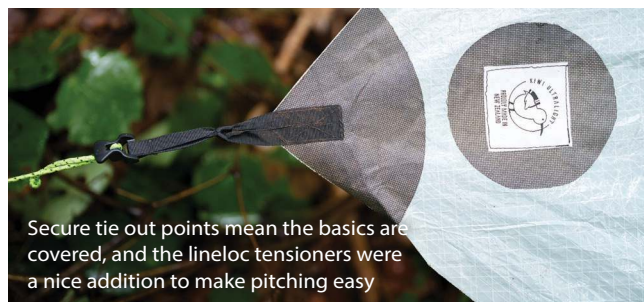


The bug bivy is a great way to actually enjoy fly camping when there are sandflies and mosquitoes around

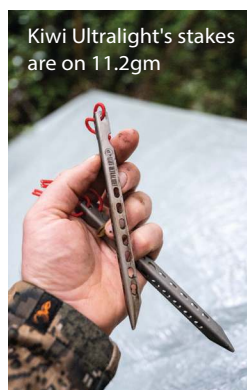
the bug bivy. Something I've yet to come across in NZ, but wish I had.

Fly camping is fun, lightweight and easy. I do it a lot, I did it all April. But I've never regretted the decision more than a hot and humid night in December 2022. I'd just worked my way up the bottom end of Mt Adams on the West Coast to watch some slips for chamois. The sandflies are just part of the landscape and I've learnt to live with them mostly, but the mosquitos ... years later I'm haunted by what a terrible night that was. Swarms of bloodthirsty mosquitos descended on my exposed body as soon as the sun went down. I was caught between roasting alive by tightly sealing my sleeping bag, or being eaten alive whenever I had to expose some skin to breathe again. I got zero sleep and arose drenched in sweat and so painfully swollen on my face and around my eyes that I had to walk out!

I needed the bug bivy - a lightweight inner to use alone, or pair with the 3x3 tarp, or any fly really. It is essentially a mesh bivy bag, weighing 250gm and stretching 215 by 85cm to easily accommodate a large sleeping bag and the inevitable bits and bobs you want close.



Secure tie out points mean the basics are covered, and the lineloc tensioners were a nice addition to make pitching easy



Kiwi Ultralight's stakes are on 11.2gm



The bivy (L) and tarp (R) only weigh 770gm together

It has a 4000mm 20D Silpoly floor and comes with guy ropes so you can utilise the same tie out points as the tarp if you want, or use Kiwi Ultralight's titanium pegs. They're another super lightweight addition at just 11.2gm each. It doesn't use poles for shape, just attaches to the fly above you. Very easy to use, the bivy reduces a bit of draft under the fly as well as keeping you away from the creepy crawlies. I'm looking forward to the double model though, Sam thought it was a bit rough asking me to sleep outside



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Carol had carefully closed the gap from 150 to 25 yards of this mature sika stag while he was bedded. Patiently waiting an hour and a half, the stag eventually stood up to check a distant roar and in an instant was standing just seven yards from Carol. After a three-minute stare down the stag moved off and out of sight. Unfortunately the stag never gave Carol an opportunity to draw her bow before it moved away. While a shot hadn't been fired it had truly been a memorable experience.

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Photo by Mitchell Ewart

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Lachie Bassett (13) with a 120lb Wairarapa Boar



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Hunter Melvin (7) with his first deer. Shot in the roar at 300 yards using his 6.5 Creedmoor



Luke Smith (15) with his first deer, shot in Southland with a Steyr 223



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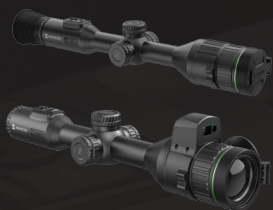
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WRITTEN BY - COREY CARSTON

MAKING DO

Couldn't be any simpler, a piece of burlap draped over a log

The poor old parry drake looked rather bemused as he slowly bobbed around in the decoy spread less than 15 feet from where Kiera and I were crouched down

Despite being that close, he literally had no idea that death and an eager black Labrador lurked mere metres away..

Her incessant whinging told me that Kiera had seen him, and was waiting rather impatiently for me to raise the Benelli so she could be cut loose to do her thing and retrieve him for me.

While we continued to watch him, he casually swam right up to the spinner and briefly snagged himself on one of the trailing decoy lines. Even this did not seem to bother him overly much. I, however, was howling with laughter and Kiera's eyes were looking at me with an expression clearly saying "What the hell is wrong with you?"

While casually sipping on an ever-present and rapidly emptying can of coke, a pair of mallards were seen to the far left-hand side of me. Silently, I hurriedly put the can down and cursed myself for not seeing the mallards and letting them surprise me. I picked up my call and gave them the biggest, loudest, most drawn-out hail call I could muster.

Initially, I didn't think it had worked, as they paid me little heed and continued

parallel. With some pleading and constant calling the drake's head slowly swivelled in my direction, and as if using some secret duck ESP, they both dived back, folded up spectacularly and dipped into the decoys.

Now it was time for the Benelli to shine and two shots later both mallards were on the water and Kiera had a chance to earn her keep.

The parry burst into the air at the shots and flew unmolested a few feet away from me. He had given me so much entertainment I thought it was only fair to let him go.

While all this was happening, Kiera brought back a nice late-season drake and dropped it at my feet. Sending her back out I was surprised not to see the hen anywhere.

Kiera knew there was something else to be retrieved, but for the life of her, she couldn't find it. It's always great to watch a good hunting dog figure things out and that's exactly what she did.

Raising her sensitive nose skyward, she slowly made her way back towards me, in the totally opposite direction I had expected her to go.

As she got closer, she went into stealth mode. When I saw this, I knew things were seconds away from happening, and this proved true as the hen broke cover from almost right next to us and was soon run down by the hound.

As I walked over to take the prize from her, I casually glanced back at the spot where we had been hiding. I could see why neither the parry nor those two mallards, nor the rest of the morning's bag, had noticed us. The place where we were hiding looked just like a natural bush - nothing for them to be concerned about.

After bagging those last two mallards the 2023 season was officially over for me.

Over my time hunting, I've been fortunate enough to hunt out of some truly epic maimais overlooking fantastic bodies of water. I've also had the unfortunate experience of hunting out of some absolute dog's breakfast heaps of rubbish.

I've also spent more than my fair share of time flat on my back hunting out of layout blinds and, before I owned one of them, I would just lay straight on the ground.

Some hunts have seen me hidden in holes in the ground, up trees, bobbing around in boat blinds and a few times in A-frame-type blind. Some have been very minimalist, and others have been the complete opposite. Some of the gear such as layouts and boat blinds have cost significant money and time.

I've enjoyed all the above methods, but my absolute favourite style of hunting is hunkering down under vegetation with just the barest of cover. This is also a cheap and easy way to hunt in most areas and is usually extremely portable.

CAMO NETS

Camo nets can be great and are definitely portable, but I don't really like them. The regular and familiar old ex-army nets have colours that are rather uniform and often don't blend in as well as they could. They also can rot after time and are easily ruined if you happen to catch them on anything.

They aren't solid, so approaching waterfowl can often see movement behind them that may spook them. You really need to be as camo'd up as possible behind them.

The newer nylon nets are lighter and even more portable. The colours are better and often you can pick a colour that best suits your hunting situation. They are much more solid so waterfowl cannot detect movement behind them.

One of their big drawbacks is the lack of weight. This is great when carrying them in. However, if there's a wind, they will fly around like a sail unless properly staked.

They are nowhere near as durable as the ex-army ones, and those I've had smell like petrol when new, and can be really slimy when wet.

Both types tend to sag and need to be staked extra tight or they look very unnatural and will not cover you up as well as you would like.

But the very worst thing about them is that they're a snag magnet. Duck calls, dogs, drinks, and guns have all become hopelessly and sometimes dangerously entangled in them.

Sticks are camo nets' worst enemy, closely followed by dogs, as most hard drive dogs tend go straight through the net instead of around it. When this happens chaos normally ensues - and a lot of ribbing from your mates, if it's not their dog!

If that's all you have to use and are happy with them, then keep on keeping on with them, but they are definitely my least favourite way to conceal myself.



The flax blind is my go to one-man blind. It's a lot smaller and lighter and I'll use it if I have a big carry ahead of me

SCRIM

I'm a big fan of scrim or burlap.

Again, these do have drawbacks, such as being very heavy and becoming even heavier when wet. If not taken care of, they will eventually start to rot. However, they look extremely natural and have absolutely no shine. As they are heavier, they don't blow around in the wind as much and the tangling factor is somewhat minimised.

It's also much more windproof than either type of camo net, especially those with a tighter weave.

You can buy big pre-dyed rolls from many hunting stores. If it's not quite the right colour, a quick blast with a few cans of matt spray paint will make it blend in better with your chosen spot.

Most hunters avoid shops such as Spotlight and other fabric stores like the plague, but they do stock lengths of various grades and weaves of burlap. Some are even pre-dyed brown instead of the normal tan colour. You could dye them to better match your location, but spray paint works just as well.

Once or twice over the years, I have quickly repainted mine before a particular hunt to better blend in.

The best painting method I've found is to hang it up from the clothesline.



Plenty of room here in the flax blind for all my gear and the dog. The flax blind cost a whopping \$20 and some time spent threading flax through. Time well spend I think.

This allows you to get a good and even distribution of paint across it and you can actually see what you're doing. If you need to, you can paint one side one colour and the other side another colour, thus making one piece much more versatile.

It is important to remember that burlap needs to be dry when you put it away for the season, as it will fall to pieces if not stored properly.

NETTING

A very cost-effective way to make your own portable blind is with the plastic netting sold at hardware and gardening stores. It's available in different colours but my favourite (and the most useful to us as waterfowlers) is brown. From memory, it's a whopping \$20 for three metres.

You can weave vegetation through it, or in the case of the hunt I described at



Kiera with the last hunt of the season. We simply put a couple of stakes in the ground, stretched the blind out and got stuck into it. This one is a variation of the flax blind

A blue plastic drum sawn in half with one end removed. It makes a great cheap layout for mud and wet paddocks. Bigger units could get another drum and add a middle section. Great thing about it is you can also use it as a gear sled

the start of the article, I used old marsh grass that was left over from a boat blind build. I'd painted it and cable-tied it onto the netting. You could also use strips of scrim or drape a net over it giving the net rigidity. The possibilities are endless.

My personal favourite is flax, but you can also use grasses and rushes. The more you add, the better it looks and the more concealed you will be, but conversely the more vegetation you add the heavier and less portable it will be. Simply weave the flax and rushes through the gaps.

It's probably not the thing to carry if you have to cart it a good distance; it's more suited to hunting close to where you park.

I've made a couple now: a smaller one for myself and the dog and a larger one for when I've got company. If you hunt in a big group, you can easily join a couple together.

FLOATING BLINDS

Years back a good mate of mine came up with a simple but ingenious way of hunting tidal flats and surface water.

He got a black 44-gallon drum, cut it lengthways, then glued and riveted both halves together, making a small

sled that you could lie in - keeping you out of the water. With burlap and grass or rushes scattered on top of you, and wearing a face mask, you could hunt in mud and shallow water without getting wet. With a rope attached to the front, it can be loaded up with decoys and other gear and towed behind like a sled.

Taller hunters could easily cut the bottom out of it for legs. You would probably get wetter but would be far more comfortable.

When hunting in water, it's a good idea to have a simple stake system to anchor it, as the second you get up it will start to float away.

Another good project would be to make one out of a big milk tank. Although not as portable, it could be left in a spot you frequently hunt. At only \$100, it's a cheap way to make a cool hide.

HANDY KIT

One of my most used bits of kit is a fold-up pruning saw. This simple \$30 purchase has been responsible for the demise of thousands of ducks and the odd goose or two.

I've used it not only to prune back branches and vegetation that would otherwise hinder my shooting, but also to create some of the most natural-looking blinds I've ever made.

Cut-down willows and mānuka branches pushed into the ground make an awesome hide. You organise them as you choose and simply hide behind it. The trick is to ensure that you keep yourself

hidden but allow yourself the best unrestricted shot when the opportunity presents itself.

I once made a simple willow blind beside a river back-wash where I frequently hunted. To make it look even more natural and to better conceal myself, I used a good handful of long grass and weaved it through the willows.

When I returned to hunt it next season, the willows had grown, and the grasses had weaved themselves through them, making it look like a small clump of willows.

That easy build has been modified over the years and now has four sheep posts, a front and back rail, and a simple bench seat inside. Before the start of the season, I give it a quick hair-cut with the hedge cutter, and it's good to go.

Even simpler is to find a good spot beside a water way and hunker down in rushes. Some of my most exciting and memorable hunts have been just like that. You can literally put yourself right where the ducks want to go.

If you keep still and wear camo clothing appropriate for the environment, it's amazing how close you can get to birds that would pull you short of the most well-dressed mai-mai.

SITTING OUT

Another cool and exciting thing that I admit I no longer do due to the advent of layout blinds is simply getting camo'd up using colours as close to the natural vegetation and lie out in a paddock or open river bed. A simple face mask and gloves can make you all but invisible.

I couldn't tell you how many freezing cold but enjoyable hours I've spent with my hunting bag as a pillow, or at times on late evening hunts, with my old dog Ripley as a pillow.

We all know that the more ducks and geese are hunted, the more wary and harder to hunt they become. Those lucky hunters with longer seasons will notice this even more. One thing I've observed over my years as a waterfowler that ducks and geese start to avoid even the best dressed blinds. They won't actually shy off them but give them a good wide berth.

There are many ways that you can put yourself into the prime spot, look natural and shoot lots of birds without breaking the bank. And with good portability you can simply pack up and move if you're not quite in the right spot or the conditions change. You can't do with a maimai

Maybe try something different next time you're out!





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Think safety this duck hunting season

Nothing is as exciting as settling into the maimai on the first Saturday of May. You've waited months for this day to roll around again – opening weekend of duck season is here!

The maimai is full of friends, family and the dog. While you can't control whether the birds will be plentiful, you know keeping yourself, and everyone in your group safe takes more than just luck.

The best hunters follow the seven basic rules of firearms safety and insist that others do the same. This duck season we urge hunters everywhere to have a plan for their maimai, so everyone

knows what to do before the first ducks arrive. An organised maimai helps with a successful hunt. A good bag, and a safe, enjoyable weekend has nothing to do with luck.



The more people around, the greater the risks

The maimai can be a busy place, so make a plan before the ducks start landing. Swinging your shotgun while following gamebirds can shift your aim into an unsafe direction. Agree in advance your safe firing zones, and stick to them. Stay aware of where your companions are.

Quick tips

- Never point, or allow others to point, a firearm at any person!
- All hunters agree at the start of the day on the direction they will shoot and keep to this plan.
- Shotguns that are not in use should be in a firearm holder/rest, unloaded, and with the muzzle pointing in a safe direction.

Treat every firearm in the maimai as loaded

Treat every shotgun as if it is loaded – no matter how sure you are that it's not. That means keeping the muzzle pointing away from yourself and other people, finger off the trigger, and having control of the shotgun at all times.

Quick tips

- Treat your shotgun as if it is always loaded.
- Do not take anyone else's word that a firearm is unloaded – always check.
- Never lean your shotguns where they could slide or be knocked over.

Save any drinks for after the hunt

We know opening day is a great opportunity for people to get together. But keep the drinks on ice until the hunt is over. Alcohol and firearms don't mix! Stay sharp. Save the refreshment until after you've safely locked your guns away for the day.

Quick tips

- Do not drink alcohol before or while using your firearms.
- Do not hunt with anyone else who is, or has been, drinking.
- Gears before beers – safely lock your firearms away before going for a drink.

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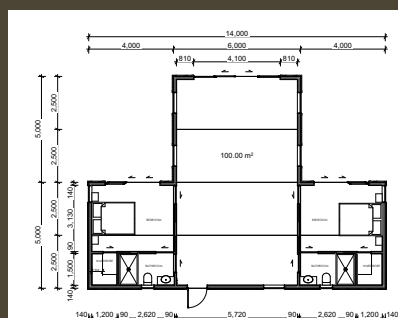
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WRITTEN BY ~ RICHARD HINGSTON

UNCLE GEOFF'S TAHR MEATBALLS

I must confess, Geoff isn't my uncle, but he is a good knowledgeable bloke who has shared a lot of tips with me while hunting on the hill

I was pleased to have his company earlier in the year when we managed to get three nannies.

This is great comfort food for winter, cheap and practical to make. If you haven't been on a tahr hunt or live in the North Island, then this will also work with venison or mince from the supermarket—but not as tasty!

Meatballs or a type of meatball has been around since the Qin Dynasty and ancient Roman times, and originating in Persia, but if we look at the world today there isn't really a country that doesn't have a dish on their menu that includes meatballs of some sort or another. The American version derives from European cuisine and even the Italians have small meatballs on their pizza.

In earlier days meat was expensive, and in the current cost-of-living crisis, this is a great cost-effective dish. Meatballs are the perfect solution to make a little meat go a long way, as you can have small amounts of meat mixed with bread, oats or potatoes to stretch it further, all covered in a tasty sauce. Kids love to be involved the process of making meatballs, where they get their hands right into it shaping the balls. It gives them a vested interest in the dish and they'll want to eat it once it's cooked.

TIPS FOR MAKING GREAT MEATBALLS

Ground meat: either tahr, chamois or venison. If it is lean mince (depending upon the original cut of meat) you could add some fatty pork mince, such as minced pork belly to the mixture.

Milk: presoak the breadcrumbs with milk to add flavour to the dish and make it more moist. Milk will also add richness. If dairy-free, then substitute milk with almond, oat or soy milk, or use a flavoured liquid stock

Herbs: use fresh where possible. Dried herbs will also work but use less as they will be stronger.

Eggs: adds moisture as well but is also a key ingredient to bind the mix together.

Cheese: adds flavour, but for an authentic taste then use Parmigiano Reggiano - it's worth the cost!

Onion and garlic: sauté first to release the flavour and soften the onions.

Ice cream scoop: to make equal-sized meatballs then use a trigger-release ice



cream scoop dipped in water so the mixture doesn't stick. Otherwise, wet hands will stop the mixture from sticking too much, as the mixture will be soft and sticky when handling.

Moulding: mould or shape the meatballs with gentle pressure as tight or over-worked meat balls will end up being dense once cooked.

Cooking: avoid overcooking the meatballs as they will dry out. Cook in the sauce for the last five to ten minutes to take on the flavour of the sauce. Meatballs are cooked when the thermometer reaches 75°C, and the time will vary depending upon the size of the meatball and the oven temperature. If using an air fryer, then use a single layer and use the same time and temperature for cooking and add to sauce for the last few minutes as with conventional cooking.

MEATBALLS

Makes 30 meatballs, slightly larger than a golf ball

- 1 cup fresh white breadcrumbs, crusts removed (Gluten free breadcrumbs may be used)
- ½ cup milk, or milk substitute
- 500gm minced tahr
- 2 Tbsp oil
- ½ a small onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 large egg
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 Tbsp chopped parsley and/or rosemary or thyme
- ½ cup grated Parmigiano Reggiano

Method

Preheat oven to 200°C

Heat the oil in a fry pan and sauté the onion and garlic until soft. Allow to cool slightly.

Combine the breadcrumbs and milk in a mixing bowl and rest for three to five minutes.

Add all the remaining ingredients and mix well to combine.

Portion the meatballs onto a non-stick baking tray and shape.

Bake the meatballs approximately ten to twelve minutes, then transfer to the sauce to finish cooking.

Check that the internal temperature of 75°C has been reached. Serve on cooked spaghetti and top with more freshly grated cheese and chopped fresh herbs.



TOMATO MEATBALL SAUCE

- 3 Tbsp oil
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 700gm tin/bottle of tomato pasta sauce
- ½ cup water or stock or red wine
- 6 Tbsp chopped parsley, thyme, rosemary oregano etc, or use half that amount with mixed dried herbs.
- Seasoning to taste – salt and pepper

Method

Heat the oil in a fry pan and add the onion and garlic. Cook until soft.

Add the remaining ingredients and bring to the boil. Turn down to a slow simmer and cook for approximately five minutes.

Taste and season, then combine with the meatballs.



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